

The

S o u n d

P r o j e c t o r



Conrad Schnitzler
'I don't like Titles!'

Electronix
Kosmische
JapCore

Tricky
Isolationism
Techno Animal

Obscure UK 1970s
The True Meaning of
False Nostalgia
Prog Rock

**2nd Issue
1997**



The Listening Post

Sun Ra: The Surrealist Cosmographer

Dæmons of Musique Concrète

Record Review
Music Magazine

Dark Ambient

Exclusive Interview
My Strange Life
Florian Fricke

'Better Listening Thru Imagination'

The Sound Projector 2nd Issue
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Sound Projector second issue

Summer 1997

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First Issue 1996

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Back Issues

Send £3.50 for a copy of Sound Projector's first issue, which features more skewed opinions on Japanese Noise, Krautrock and Electronix, plus a surprisingly popular Theremin page, an interview with Alig Pearce, featurettes on Harry Partch and La Monte Young, and cartloads of record reviews.

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Editorial

Better Listening through Imagination...all I can do is make Sound Projector a personal statement. The extravagant claims and flights of fantasy simply reflect the effects I believe music is having on me, but that's no reason that you, gentle reader, should adopt them. But we hope to show you other ways in which to exercise your own imagination when selecting and listening to records, and aim to enhance the listening experience for all. We could apologise once again for the scarcity of hard facts, but there it is...anyway there's enough factual information in the world, surely there's a place for a little creative thinking on the subject! If the mainstream music press are the High Priests of orthodoxy, then Sound Projector is a charismatic evangelist.

Naturally this is a tricky area, as we do not wish to descend to the level of the callow music journalists who to this day consider their own personality to be more interesting than the music. Easy enough to pattern one's writing style after the great Lester Bangs, but for those writers who lack his generous personality, the results can tend to resemble dull diary entries. At The Sound Projector we still think the music is the most important thing, but maintain there must be way to refract its light through the prism of the soul, and not just the mind. If we can do this, what kaleidoscopic delights might ensue.

Herein this issue are two self-indulgent wallows in the illegal pleasures of progressive rock by John Bagnall and myself, perhaps only to be expected from thirty-somethings who grew up in Liverpool - notice my reproduction of the Virgin Megastore (Liverpool branch) bag circa 1978, which turned up in my collection of junk. The Japanese seem to adore UK Prog also - bend an ear to Cinorama for a King Crimson lyric-check, or Che Shizu for a musical quote from Fripp and Co's first LP. The Ruins live on stage in London April 1997 regaled the audience with a hilarious and brilliant medley of 30 progressive rock tunes played in 3 minutes flat; I almost thought it was a joke until I caught a fragment of a Tony Banks 'Firth of Fifth' solo. 'Do you like Progress Rock?' asked the drummer, 'I rove it!!!!'

Yours eccentrically
The Editor

Thanks to kind reviewers in *The Wire* and *Ptolemaic Terrascope*, and to supportive folk at *Cargo*, *Real Time*, *Chris @ Compendium Books*, *Mick @ Helter Skelter*, *Darryl @ Rough Trade*, *Peter Pavement*, *These Records*, *Fisheye distro*.

Editor's Note - in spite of the 'Skipload of Tapes' column and other reviews this issue, please note it is not current Sound Projector policy to review cassette releases by amateurs. Submissions are emphatically not welcome at the editorial address, nor are reviews or mentions guaranteed for unsolicited material.

The Sound Projector 2nd issue is written and illustrated by **Ed Pinsent**, with contributions by these great fellows: **Edwin Pouncey, John Bagnall, Cindy War Arrow** and **Harley Richardson**
Also many thanks to **Norbert Schilling**

Back cover drawing by **John Godbert**, as is the Starlit Mire drawing used on Discurator's Den page.

John Bagnall provided his own line drawings for his Prog Rock article, and also sketch of The Can p 30.

Other picture credits: 'Head of a Native Woman' 1948 by Luis Arenal, p 55

Matt Fox (monster about to eat The Dark bassist), p 52
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Solo! [A Manifesto] by Conrad Schnitzler

Solo Voices	Solo Tracks	Individual voice.
Soloist	Individualist	Egotist
Voice	Note	Tone Colour
Pitch	Volume	Dynamics
Rhythm	Variety	Harmonics
Freedom	Monochrome	Expression.
Tonal	Atonal	Changeable
Static	Mobile	Cloudy
Clear	Dark	Light
Fast	Complex	Transparent
Fat	Lean	Abstract
Informal	Experimental	Conventional
Glassy	Metallic	Concrete
Electric	Calm	Agitated
Flowing	Reclining	Percussive
Downward	Upward	Slow
Risk	Tormenting	Colourful
Garrulous	Indescribable.	

Letters

From Chris Cutler

Hi Ed - happy to receive The Sound Projector - only the Keiji article I found the tiniest bit OTT...I wonder sometimes what the writers would make of Keiji's reactions to their writings (I saw it ref. Biba Kopf's also OTT piece in *The Wire*) - why Keiji is good, I think, is because he's an artist - it means: it ain't real. But this is minor - the enthusiasm is better than the usual cynicism, would be a positive gloss.

From Andrea B (who sent me a copy of her published interview with Moondog)

...Sound Projector is very very good. The style of writing is passionate and exciting, not too reverent or stuffed full of library paste! When my finances improve I'll buy extras for my friends...I honestly felt your article on MOONIE was better - it expresses your personality and is not dry like mine....Amazingly everything in SP was inspiring to me - especially the sensibility of 'The Listening Post' - sort of coming across LPs by chance (£1 or less natch!). Recently I got a Folkways Dutch Folk Songs LP (1956) and the man sounds like Ivor Cutler. Unexpected forgotten non-trendy stuff I guess! I can't even buy new releases due to cost...thanks again and already I'm rubbing my hands together waiting for SP #2!

(Andrea is Azalia Snail - her new LP is reviewed this issue. She is also planning to release a record of poetry by Moondog).

From Paul Gravett

I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed Sound Projector. It's an intense work of reference and enthusiasm. I don't know much about hardly any of the artists, but you and your fellow writers really put across their virtues and ideas. Congratulations on a stirring piece of editing and publishing - a UK Research on wondrous musics!

From Timothy d'Arch Smith

Thank you very much for sending the excellent Sound Projector and especial thanks for your very kind review of Peepin. Nobody else has 'got' the book as you have 'got' it. You've put your finger on exactly my plan of campaign and I'm very grateful to you for the generous space you gave it...I'm going to settle properly to the magazine and am most relieved to find it includes a guide to Boredoms, a grey area with me. Best of luck to it. Will it be available in the shops? I'm sure Helter Skelter will take copies. I know them quite well there and they are pleasant folk.

I'm feeling a little embarrassed at a personal feeling of 'not un-niceness' (as Philip Larkin said about a jazz record rather out of his line) about techno and its spin-offs. I have a godson who has an unerring eye - let alone ear - for those anonymous (how right you are about that) twelve-inchers. I do think The Orb is vastly overrated though.

I found a quote in Joseph Conrad's *Victory* quite apposite (although Conrad was being disparaging) about 'our' music: 'There is an unholy fascination in systematic noise'.

From Chris Butler

...I'm enjoying it, though of course as I've not heard of 90% of the artists mentioned I have to approach the articles as modernist short stories revealing, obliquely, the character and alienation of the narrator. I enjoyed the interview with Alig Pierce. He seemed very genuine. I also liked the spine and the length of the magazine. I think not trying to be 'current' is a smart move, shelf-life wise. I especially liked seeing your illustrations in this context. It suits them. And I just get pleasure from your use of line. Good to see it appearing somewhere.

From Kyran Lynn

...The Sound Projector really is an excellent read. All the articles were of interest and I found myself making a list of things to look out for as I went through it...I think a real strength of its coverage is that it isn't limited to 'recent' releases. Got to say your 'Record Shops in London' article had me pretty wound up. Maybe that was the intention? Although I agree with a lot of what you say, your flat dismissal of DJ-ing as a 'meaningless race' is outrageous. Early Electro and Hip-Hop was the first music to really interest me and I still consider it my biggest influence. So I guess you touched a nerve there! I must tape you some tracks to make you reconsider...



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The Sound Projector 2nd issue 1997

Some general notes... 'well music is changing isn't it?' reads a touching fibre-tip note at my local CD store at the Elephant, sellotaped over the shelf of a little Ambient - Techno - Trance section. Why the devil do I listen to this stuff? Perhaps Bob Parker was right - many years ago he was dubbing this sort of swill a modern equivalent to 1970s prog-rock. And in terms of pretentiousness and over-blown self-indulgence, he may not be far wrong! Now that I've locked into this seam of material it's become terribly addictive - like taking Soma, Aldous Huxley's soporific sleep-inducing drug. I should have heeded that stern warning 'Drown in your Soma Bath' issued by The Legendary Pink Dots. Give me a sprawling overlong Ambient CD and I'll chomp on it for hours like a baby with a huge biscuit crammed in its gob. I'm not particularly proud of this. Of course I'm missing out on the social dimension, never been near a chill-out room in my life, but these ethereal sounds are a welcome palliative and often fill up large spaces in my empty life. Yet the stuff's maddening. Florian Fricke's observation that this music lacks a centre is quite accurate; but this lack of focus is what makes it so dangerously approachable. The ideal for me is finding myself in a thick fog of music, with no awareness of how I arrived there - like being lost in the middle of Dante's dark wood. Perhaps I should employ some mischievous minion to play me CDs at random, at weird hours of the day and night. And returning to that sleepiness aspect, some of these CDs have provided me with sweet soundtracks for very enjoyable 20 minute naps. But then I've always used music that way - Pink Floyd sent me to the Land of Nod more than once in my adolescence! This is not to imply the music's boring; the truth is I welcome any means of getting in touch with a rich subconscious vision, and try and model myself after the Surrealists in that way. The comforting swaddle of Isolationism is also touched on below; but for a little more grit in your electronica diet, taste the stern brew of Bruce Gilbert, or the aggressive punch of The Sidewinder. Incidentally, all of the above allusions to Soma, sleep, fog - and biscuits - are endorsed by the titles of Ambient CDS and tracks. If you are inclined to doubt this, flick thorough the swelling second-hand Ambient section at SelectaDisc sometime.

The Crackling Ether



**Techno Animal, *Re-Entry*, Virgin
AMBT 8 / 7243 8 40404 20 (1995)**

**Tricky, *Maxinquaye*, Island BRCD
610/524 089-2 (1995)**

Two items, not really connected, and I probably wouldn't have bought them but for the fact that *The Wire* made them sound kind of interesting in 1995, so by now it's all old hat to you hipsters I have no doubt. Techno Animal's offering is totally nightmarish, and sheer delight for the stereo, it works on one level as just purely enjoyable explorations of textures. Right from the start I was overwhelmed by some sense of gargantuan scale, and this not just the fact that it's a double CD (each disc over an hour long). I mean this wonderful illusion of experiencing more than you're hearing. They prove the drug of music really does work. Tremendous use of subliminals - grunts, shifts, blips, all manner of things right on the edges of perception somewhere, hinting at much darker forces and huge physical shapes beneath. Of course to arrive at this point you have to listen your way down through layers of barbed wire mixed with tendrils and bracken. But when you arrive, here is this fascinating bedrock, an undulating concrete ocean, simultaneously liquid and rock solid. Beneath it there lurk all manner of strange beasts. So this record succeeds in fashioning an entire separate planet, with its own strata and volcanic rock formations, whose history is all there to be read by those equipped with aural geiger counters and geological hammers. The sleeve art of course hints at another dimension, the populating of this strange

world with hideous cyborg entities, among them a robot baboon and a computer-generated dragonfly. No fluffy theme-park comfort to be found here, rather a terrifying rollercoaster ride through the possibilities of digital futures.

Techno Animal is two guys, Kevin Martin and J Broadrick, joined here by other musicians, among them the great Jon Hassell on trumpet fed through pedals, filters and overall studio technique, methods Hassell has been employing for many years. I was intrigued enough by this to pick up a vinyl copy of his *Possible Musics*, which is a nifty item (I had been put off by many elements before, the Eno connection, the pseudo-ethnography feel, the bland sleeve). *Re-Entry* consists of two suites, 'Dream Machinery' is the aggressive primary disc, exploring the scaffolded superstructure of this alien world - check out titles like 'City Heathen Dub' and 'Demodex Invasion'; where auxiliary disc 'Heavy Lids' drags us through the murky swamp of the city's insecure foundations. The latter disc nods in the Ambient direction but it's no less disturbing for being quieter and not as sharply focused. This record was a revelation to me. It apparently demonstrates all kinds of imaginative and resourceful approaches to dub mixing, sampling and use of electronics. Executed in a seamless manner that makes all the edits disappear. But I can't emphasise enough that the terror of the whole enterprise is what sweeps you along, a vision of darkness inexorably proceeding like a monster virus throughout our decomposing urban empires, at all levels.

There's been a lot of water under the bridge since *Maxinquaye* first appeared, and bits of mythology are accruing - some of it self-made by the artist, some of it pasted on by clueless media folk. Tricky has been in *The Guardian Weekend* where the journalist tried to portray him as a mysterious demon figure. Also, *Nearly God* and *Pre Millennium Tension* have been released - neither CD is yet on my shelf, but apparently these alone have been cause for a Tricky backlash in some circles. Such is the over-riding imperative - the relentless thirst for novelty, and some wayward concomitant perception of 'hipness' - that can sometimes prevent listeners from simply using their ears, making their own judgements. *Maxinquaye* is a fine record in anyone's book and I understand it is deservedly popular, bringing the best of a particular style of music to a wider audience. The astonishing surface is what draws you in first - quite honestly few things in life sound as interesting as this - dense, confusing, and filled with unexpected dynamics. The voices are fantastic: Martine's sad whimper to the fore, plaintive and smitten with some secret pain, barely controlled emotion, yet resigned. Tricky himself adopts the voice of a murmuring dark magus, startlingly effective when he mutters the same lyric out of step with Martine.

After this wears off, you're still left with an uncanny eccentricity which still seems to baffle some listeners, hence perhaps these attempts to 'psychoanalyse' Tricky the artist via some superficial readings of Tricky the person. He remains however a shrewd figure, as protean as the Fool in the Tarot pack, moving freely within contexts and definitions, guided by his artistic demons and perhaps with one eye on the rear mirror to see if anyone's caught up with him yet. But, like his enormous vehicle here on the back cover, Tricky can traverse all kinds of difficult terrain with apparent ease. An intriguing image is this truck. Its camouflage marking suggests a covert military operation

(although he simultaneously blows his cover, announcing his name in large stencilled lettering), the long whip aerial indicates secret message broadcasts and connects to his sonic mission. It is parked in a sandy area difficult to reach, and tire tracks leading both ways show he can move whichever way he likes.

Each track is a different fantastic voyage into harsh landscapes, dream environments, obsessive nightmares and visions. These are realised through a prescient, magical mastery of the sonic studio space. Anything can be used in Tricky's palette of sounds and textures, thus the familiar mix of sampling and real-time musicians playing. Tricky seems to perceive the whole sound environment in a perfect hyper-real 3-D, and is able to insert his inspired, fleeting details with extraordinary precision - it's like glimpsing brightly coloured tropical fish darting past your retinas for a millisecond. This is surely the Eisenstein 'montage' aesthetic given a new twist and a new lease of life: through his edits and juxtapositions, Tricky unleashes dark emotions, leaves odd traces and impressions and, through the adding of yet another element in the mix, accretes new layers of double-bluff, contradictory meanings. Is he not the Jean-Michel Basquiat of music? Familiar popsong concepts of 'development' through the traditional verse-chorus structure of a song are refused, in favour of simply repeating the same hooks, verses, riffs - into an infinity of hysterical self-reflecting and self-parodying echoes, a mirror ball picking up new colours and shapes on each successive spin. I find this particularly on the tracks 'Ponderosa' and 'Black Steel', which simply grow increasingly insane and demented as they progress. In fact this same pattern is echoed by the linear sequence of tracks here - the record becomes almost totally incoherent by the end, with 'Strugglin' menacing you every second with its shotgun sound effect used as a percussion track, and 'Feed Me' with its glissandos of fucked-up, disintegrating robot voice.

He plays clever games with your memory - a song can linger on in your mind long afterwards, even in the middle of the night an echo or phrase will return to haunt you, so it's best to play it one track at a time to minimise brain damage. Yet, another listening of the exact same track will yield totally different results. Presumably the snippet of *Blade Runner* dialogue here confirms this science fiction Philip K Dick-ish element.



Surely both these excellent records are examples of 100% studio-based approach to making records - in neither case could tracks like these be pre-composed at a piano, nor indeed notated in that way afterwards. They give us hope for the medium of music's potential as a tool for the effective communication of ideas in ways that circumvent logic and linear thinking.



**Various Artists,
Isolationism, Virgin
AMBT 4 (1994)**

My understanding is that this compilation coined the phrase 'Isolationism' which for a time has gained some currency (amongst critics and record stores) to describe a certain strain of Ambient music; a useful tool for those chroniclers who enjoy splintering this work into sub-categories. One could take Isolationism to mean music which is by nature withdrawn and introverted, creating an artificial environment of great comfort to the listener; from this follows accusations that this music is not outgoing, is no fun whatsoever, and appeals chiefly to the shy and socially inadequate in need of a 'virtual womb' to cushion themselves from the harsh realities of life.

That may be. I'm encouraged to see such an interesting mixture of artists, this compilation has a very catholic

definition of its terms, so it includes contributions across a wide spectrum: from the avant-gardish zones we have AMM, the Japanese noise-meisters Keiji Haino and KK Null, Jim O'Rourke, Paul Schütze; from slightly more familiar Ambient territories, Techno Animal, Aphex Twin, Scorn, Lull, Main. Each track overlaps into the next, so that each disc almost describes a gigantic panoramic vista; in a way to separate everything out reduces the project back to its constituent ingredients - the segueing and track ordering are what help to produce this excellent mixture of contrasts, light and shade.

K. Martin's sleeve note is filled with grandiose claims and I support him for doing this - whether you agree with him depends on what benefits you manage to extract from these discs. The view of many is that the term 'Ambient' starts with Brian Eno, who had a defined vision of what it ought to be - 'as ignorable as it is interesting',

but remember it came about by accident. Martin here does namecheck the effete Brian, but also situates the Isolationism 'scene' alongside a host of other, more interesting antecedents and parallel developments, and spreads this shopping list before us in a dazzling storefront of delights.

Sleeve art by The Pathological Puppy, the same imagists responsible for Techno Animal; the inside pix are dazzlers, while the front cover is a black murky blob resembling the mouth of a cave with a row of stalactites; perhaps my guess at a 'virtual womb' (or a vagina dentata?) is not far off the mark.

Scanner, ASH 1.2

Robin Rimbaud is becoming somewhat ubiquitous these days both in terms of live performances and appearances on his own and others' CDs; he even turned up on Radio 4 in July 1996, where he turned one of his sampling tricks on the dialogue fresh

out of the mouths of the presenters. His method is to monitor telephone calls using radar-ish equipment, and play back recorded edits and samples intermingled with ethereal synth backings. On this CD, I believe his first one, there is much emotion and weirdness in the ghostly voices of the unsuspecting publics, which qualities bear repeated listenings - particularly if you favour spoken word materials anyway. Inflections of accents and timbres of voices can take on something of a musical tint. Scanner's ambient backing component however can become a bit of a nuisance, and you ask yourself if it's always necessary. That said, there is an unsettling tension in the whole package, and it's always a compelling play-through listen. In a way he reminds me of Mark Boyle, who as much as I like him was something of a one-trick pony (as Scanner is in danger of becoming). Boyle used to make life sized fibre-glass casts of street sections chosen at random - there's the same 100% urban grittiness and paranoia, and the determined focus on a particular aspect of city life which everyone simply takes for granted. Scanner plucks our very speech from the air and clinically analyses it simply as digital information, regardless of content. Subversive? Not really. He does it from the safety of his bedroom using expensive spying equipment. A real confrontationalist would be out on the street with his concealed mics, or better yet shoving 'em right in the faces of unsuspecting people, getting into fights, and accepting the consequences.

Scanner is also to be heard doing it live, on a brace of recent *Sub Rosa* items which include *Main* and *David Shea*. *Quantum 102* was live at Paris in June 1996 and features a very good 'Live Firmament' by Main; *Quantum 051* was recorded May 1996. Neither of these is essential, but enjoyable enough. Having seen David Shea live now, I find he does it with a large computer based keyboard called an Ensoniq, feeding little discs into its black metal mouth. This technique allows him tremendous control over his sources - perhaps too much control. The Spitz show (1st February 1997) was professionally done, but somehow bloodless - nor did the material really engage one's attention for long.

Z'EV, *Heads and Tails*, AVANT AVAN 034 (1996)

Shudder - of all records in this issue this one probably scares me the most! Boasting '100% Recycled Sound', it's an ingeniously crafted onslaught of relentless rhythms, overlaid with disjunctive voice samples and noises of the most delectable vileness, all performed with merciless efficiency. This is a full scale attack using heat-seeking Exocet missiles, bazooka and mortar shells fired with pinpoint accuracy, leaving your inner sanctum totally devastated, in flames. I only know of Z'ev from his appearance in a Glenn Branca (who has co-production credit here) concert, where he apparently assaults a drum or gong of

seep out from between the cracks of these samples - but it is something which we could all learn from.

Cathartic, subversive, laced with black humour - a work of genius. Get a hold of this monster and use the arc-welder to seal it inside your CD player.

Bruce Gilbert, *Ab Ovo*, Mute CD STUMM 117 (1996)

This CD reminds me of a Play-Dough Fun Factory toy - imagine an electronic version that squeezes out the raw material of noise into novelty extruded shapes. Probably something to do with the somewhat 'bendy'

nature of the sounds - we don't get segmented scales or individual notes so much as a huge twisty column of blurry noise. But also Gilbert has a tremendous overall mastery of the components at his disposal, as though he's shaping up the clay in his hands before he throws it on the wheel. At the same time there's a clear building-block aspect to this method; each sound is practically stand-alone, refusing the interactive complexities of harmonics for example, and yet refusing to stick to the sounds thrown next to it.

As many of you know Gilbert continues his long standing residency as 'The Beekeeper' DJ to the Disobey Club of London. His slightly

stern and formal appearance makes me think of a strict mathematics teacher, which is hard sometimes to square with his bouts of sonic anarchy. One of the most striking Disobey events was where he performed on stage concealed inside a garden shed. This concealment is apt, as I feel there's little that's transparent about his work; to see him hunched over a control desk reveals nothing, and even if you're told he works with spray-painted CDs, it doesn't aid your understanding of the process too much. *Ab Ovo* is a

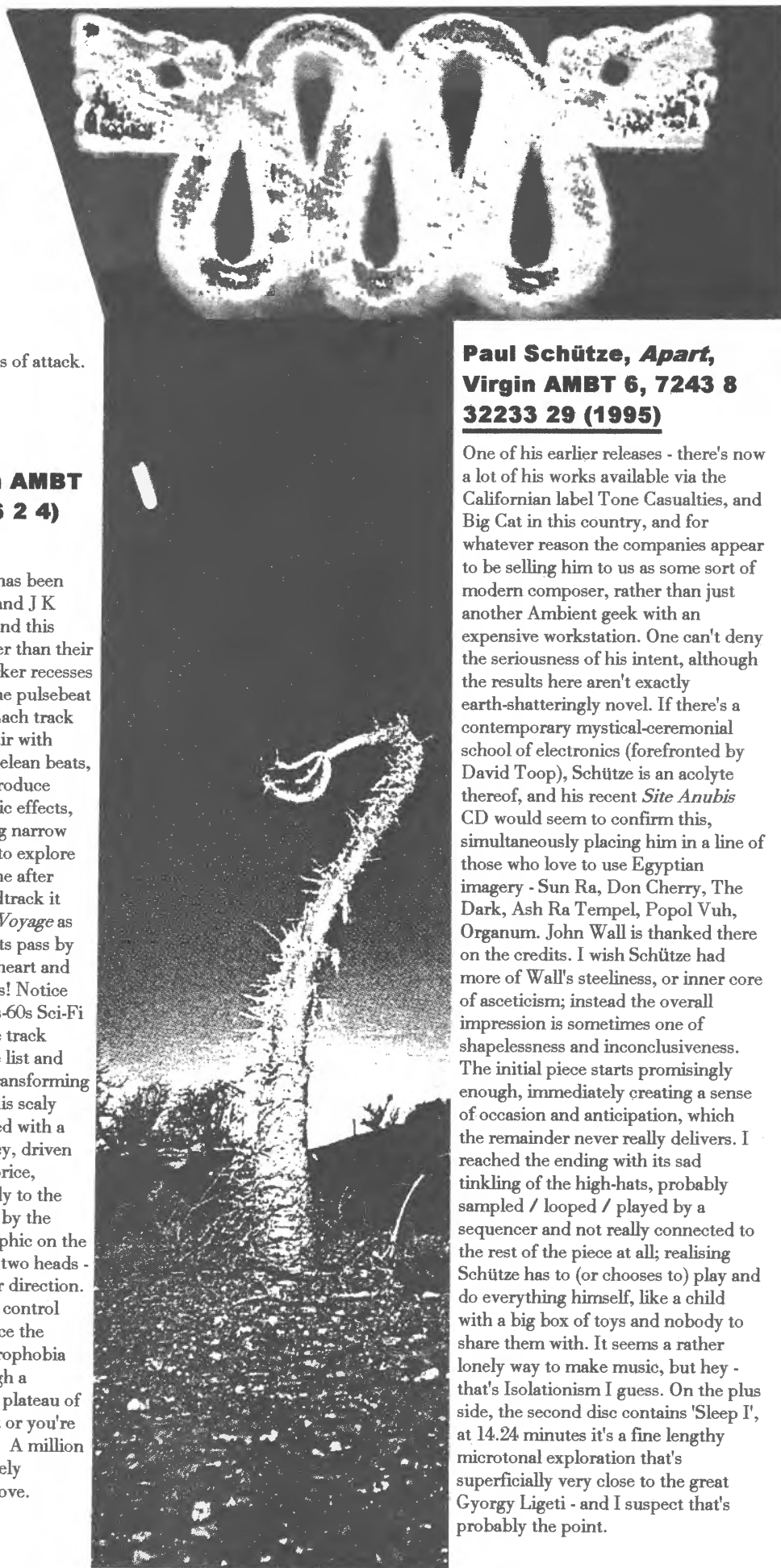


hideous proportions so as to make your very bones scatter to the four winds. This record uses contemporary Dance and Jungle sounds to the full, but not like U2 or David Bowie who simply tack it on to what they do anyway in some pathetic attempt at hipness (or just to try and sell records). Indeed no, *Heads and Tails* has something to say - and it punches every syllable of its message home using the rivet gun of drum n bass, stapling a steel plate to your skull. This vital message is not a palatable one - all kinds of unpleasant images

delightful celebration of the possibilities afforded by today's technologies, delivered with artistic confidence, added quirks and eccentricities - no traditional linear exploration of ideas, no backing beats - just a panoply of growling electronic burrs, deployed with an uncompromising fierceness of attack.

**The Sidewinder,
Colonized, Virgin AMBT
17 (7243 8 42176 2 4)
(1996)**

This truculent little beast has been released by Kevin Martin and J K Flesh of Techno Animal, and this project reaches even further than their previous foray into the darker recesses of the cerebellum. Here, the pulsebeat is practically everything. Each track immediately clogs up the air with layers of these Mephistophelean beats, muffled and doctored to produce nightmarish, claustrophobic effects, squeezing the listener along narrow channels and inviting you to explore soundworlds of menace, one after another. What a fine soundtrack it would make for *Fantastic Voyage* as those miniaturised scientists pass by the inner chambers of the heart and crash through cellular walls! Notice how many other classic 50s-60s Sci-Fi movies are hinted at by the track titles! (Send me a complete list and win a prize). If K Mart is transforming the listener into a snake, this scaly reptile we become is imbued with a frightening sense of urgency, driven to achieve its goals at any price, relentlessly pushing its body to the utmost limits. But judging by the crystal sharp computer graphic on the cover, The Sidewinder has two heads - so we could slither in either direction. The music urges us to take control and focus our energies. Once the initial repulsion and claustrophobia wears off, you travel through a bottleneck and enter a new plateau of purposefulness. Either that or you're just relieved the CD's over! A million miles away from the relatively comforting Isolationism above.



**Paul Schütze, *Apart*,
Virgin AMBT 6, 7243 8
32233 29 (1995)**

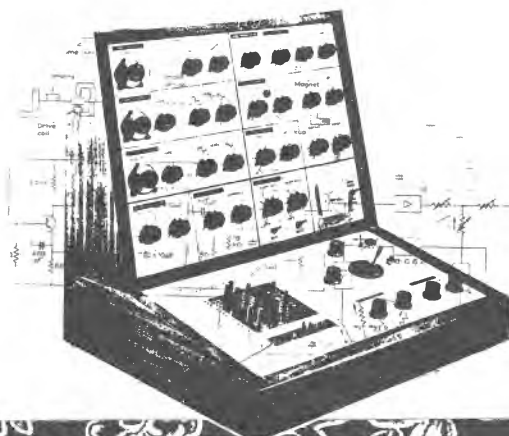
One of his earlier releases - there's now a lot of his works available via the Californian label Tone Casualties, and Big Cat in this country, and for whatever reason the companies appear to be selling him to us as some sort of modern composer, rather than just another Ambient geek with an expensive workstation. One can't deny the seriousness of his intent, although the results here aren't exactly earth-shatteringly novel. If there's a contemporary mystical-ceremonial school of electronics (forefronted by David Toop), Schütze is an acolyte thereof, and his recent *Site Anubis* CD would seem to confirm this, simultaneously placing him in a line of those who love to use Egyptian imagery - Sun Ra, Don Cherry, The Dark, Ash Ra Tempel, Pöpl Vuh, Organum. John Wall is thanked there on the credits. I wish Schütze had more of Wall's steeliness, or inner core of asceticism; instead the overall impression is sometimes one of shapelessness and inconclusiveness. The initial piece starts promisingly enough, immediately creating a sense of occasion and anticipation, which the remainder never really delivers. I reached the ending with its sad tinkling of the high-hats, probably sampled / looped / played by a sequencer and not really connected to the rest of the piece at all; realising Schütze has to (or chooses to) play and do everything himself, like a child with a big box of toys and nobody to share them with. It seems a rather lonely way to make music, but hey - that's Isolationism I guess. On the plus side, the second disc contains 'Sleep I', at 14.24 minutes it's a fine lengthy microtonal exploration that's superficially very close to the great György Ligeti - and I suspect that's probably the point.

Jessamine and Spectrum, *A Pox on You, Space Age Recordings 003 CD (1996)*

These excellent new projects of Sonic Boom, splendidly packaged on his own Space Ace Recordings label, are to my mind far more diverse and interesting than the work of Spacemen 3. I liked a lot of Spacemen 3 records but sometimes found the insistence on druggy culture not to my taste, and some of the lyrics a bit trite. Sonic is now going for 98% music and sound exploration, which can only be a good thing in my book. *A Pox on You* is credited to Spectrum and Jessamine, a splendid 30 mins 5 track item and as the first one I heard it seemed to lay out the ground rules for this project: by word and image (and music, of course!) Sonic proudly displays such influences as the BBC Radiophonic workshop, The Silver Apples, Musique Concrète, the Theremin and perhaps Joe Meek. The back sleeve shows off Sonic's new toy - a fantastic VCS-3 synth, which is undoubtedly to the fore in my favourite track here, 'Satellites', which is abstract enough to have come from the Radiophonics Workshop's *Out of this World* special effects record (BBC REC 225, 1976), and also stands as a tribute to the exemplary work of Froese and Baumann on *Zeit*. And you can't miss his tribute to 'A Pox on You', wherein he somehow manages to emulate the sound of Simeon Coxe's unique instrument via the use of Theremin and synthesizers, and mixes in a convincing Danny Taylor drum sound to boot. His take on the song is to echo the vocal heavily thus stripping it of the original bite and bile, and transforming the singer into a vengeful ghost living in the Phantom Zone, coming back to haunt an unfaithful lover.

The New Atlantis, Orbit 004 CD (1996)

Sonic Boom and friends again. The sleeve prints a Roger Bacon quote from the year 1624, which layers a notion of 17th century cosmogony over these electronic interrogations ('Wee also have sound-houses...'), and connects thus to Sun Ra's *Atlantis* and another take on Joe Meek's *New World*. This CD is a sampler for the



label and includes some early tapes of Spacemen 3 rehearsals; a take of 'Transparent Radiation' stands out, mainly because it's such a great song. It also seems to indicate Spacemen 3 had their project all worked out right at the start.

Martin Archer, *Ghost Lily Cascade, Discus 4 CD (1996)*

The William Morris wallpaper CD wrappers and inserts suggest some pastoral succour here, but as the title says it's only the ghost of a lily - nature rendered as a stylised image, mere decoration. Having visited Sheffield (where this was recorded) myself, I can testify there is little pastoral calm in that urban area, and I found ghosts of steel factories and the hideous Meadowhall shopping centre populated by further ghosts. So Archer perhaps hoists this music as a screen, a bright pennant declaring the

powers of art, to mask off the blight and vicissitudes of the world, and within the safe haven of his studio he surrounds himself with friends and kindred spirits. This music is the result and does indeed evoke that sense of a small outpost of civilisation gathered around a fire while the philistines are rioting without. Perhaps in a sense Archer is aligning himself with William Morris, proposing an idealistic artistic community? The starting point appears to have been dense synthesizer backdrops devised by Archer and his worthy constituent

Chris Bywater, with energetic acoustic instrument layers dropped over the top. These are played with skill by Simon H Fell, Brian Parsons and many others. My only problem is there isn't quite enough tension in the actual performances to make it as compelling as it could be. However Archer remains a craftsman of studio technique, this CD works as a collection of very well delineated textures and lines, a superb testament to commitment to excellence in digital recording. Such an attitude is altruistic and user-friendly compared to say the Incus approach, which to a certain extent still denies 'good' recording technique and minimises listening pleasure - the performance is everything! At least one of Archer's recurring textural components is so washed out as to be barely present, a fascinatingly insistent sandpaper electronic buzz that made me think my speakers were conking out.

Mail Order £10 all in, from PO Box 658, Sheffield S10 3YR

My way of coming to terms with the colossal achievements of Sun Ra is to see him as a creator of new worlds. A personal Cosmogony is fashioned from the air, each sphere generating its own atmosphere, a unique detailed surface. The listener becomes a Natural Historian, collating information on the populations, geography, flora and fauna of these strange globes. To buy a Sun Ra record that you haven't heard is to discover a new species. The Borges story 'Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' describes the uncanny phenomenon of a 'fictional' world invented by a team of encyclopedists which gradually replaces our own world; Borges describes 'The minute and vast evidence of an orderly planet'. With Sun Ra that story has come true. A fitting tribute would be an infinite project of Borgesian proportions: I would propose a 100 volume series of tomes dedicated to the Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra, with luxuriant colour plates of paintings by surrealist giants which limn those fantastic terrains! Max Ernst for the forests, Yves Tanguy for the deserts, De Chirico the cities, Miro the farms.

I conjure this extravagant image to suggest the grandeur and volume of Ra's recorded output, and leave the completists to the worthy task of compiling their detailed factual inventories. As the owner of a mere (!) 20-odd Ra recordings, I give this brief view to mention the bizarre film *Space is The Place*, and some recorded selections which demonstrate Ra's great keyboard work. There was never enough of this put to vinyl for my liking, but that just shows he was no ego-tripping soloist like Zawinul or Corea (Weather Report seems to exist simply as a framework for their showing off). Rather, the Arkestra could sometimes be an ideal combo for a committed artist to play in, as it dispensed with the familiar tramlines of big band combos - no charts, no bars to count in so that you'd know when to play your solo. Ra managed to evolve his teams to a point where he could enable them to enjoy a structured freedom, somewhere in between the outright open architecture of say Company (which is a different discipline in any case) and the precision of say Duke Ellington. A player contributed what they felt was right, at the right time - played for as long or as short a time as necessary, then dropped out. Which isn't to say they were incapable of getting it together to play the melody!

Space is the Place was directed by John Coney and produced by Jim Newman in 1974. You can get a video version on Rhapsody Films 9025. It has its best footage is at the beginning, pre-credits: a pink sky over a matte painting of an alien forest (very like a Gage Taylor painting). Sun Ra is exploring the new world in full Egyptian regalia. There's a plant with a glass full of black liquid. A Mickey-Mouse yellow glove plant. Soap bubbles. The cheap, Pop-Art special effects add to the disorientation no end; the floating aliens with glass helmets could almost come from a Hieronymous Bosch triptych (and don't forget the Bosch cover of *It's After the End of the World*, BASF 20748). Further dislocations follow with a ominous card game in the desert, jump cuts transporting a character to another landscape in a second. Then there's some priceless moments of Ra dispensing his bewildering epithets of wisdom, completely confounding the phonies and parasites trying to worm their way into his Outer Space Employment Agency. Listeners who require an entire CD of such wise witterings are pointed towards 'Sun Ra talks on the Possibility of Altered Destiny', on Japan DIW 388 (1994); which gives you an uninterrupted hour of this sort of thing...his monologue lecture is almost free-association, anything and everything is fair game for Ra to weave into his cosmic tapestry. Dreams, the Bible, social commentary, education, history, politics...the entire yarn's spun out using outrageous word-play technique to suggest new meanings that surely beats Andre Breton at his own game.

It is currently possible to start accumulating a fairly respectable Sun Ra collection on CD. Some recent-ish recordings (1980s) are still available, a number of them on the UK's Leo label. The crucial mid-1960s ESP albums are reissued by those fine German obsessives on ZYX: Heliocentric Worlds Volume 1, ESP 1014, and Volume 2 ESP 1017; Nothing Is, ESP 1045; and the previously unissued 1973 Concert for the Comet Kohoutek, ESP 3033-2. By far the best are the Evidence CDs, this is an impressive reissue programme that offers source recordings, sometimes two LPs formatted onto one disc, excellent sleeve notes and packages, reproes of original sleeve art and photos, and additional rare cuts. This is one case where it somehow feels better to own the CDs than the original records! A real labour of love.

Sun Ra

イギリス人が使っていたような書き方を
E-O-R-T-H-Eのようになる。シェイクスピアも
始めている訳だ。アルファとオメガは同一だから
始めと終わりは同一という様な意味か、現在
がそこに入っている。アルファはオメガと同等
すると、総ての“A”は“O”に置き換えられる
なり、それを実行してE-A-R-T-Hと綴った者がい
訳だ。音学的にはE-R-T-Hで“A”は必ずしも必
ては無いがね。これをさらに入れ換えるとT-H-R-I
となるが、分かるかい？ そう、勿論、3だ。だか
ら第3の惑星である地球は、3から名付けられてい
のだ。勿論、現在の地球は、E-A-R-T-Hであり、こ
れを入れ換えるとT-H-E-R-Aとなる。これは“THE
”、即ち私の名前だ。一方、神は天国より新たな
“私がこうしてあり、外界から来たと言っている
ち、THE RAだ。色々入れ換えを行った訳だ
レファとオメガが同じなのだから、幾らでも
るのは構わないんだ。地球の名前をTHERA



KHEPER-KHEPERU-
ARI-MA'AT-RA',



son of
the Sun,

The Surrealist Cosmographer



Some selected Ra keyboard spectaculars...

Looks like Sun Ra bought himself a Mini-Moog in 1970 and couldn't wait to try out his new toy. Others have commented on these solos resembling the translation of electric messages flying through outer space - Sun Ra as his own Jodrell Bank. Each solo is a complete statement of freedom - every note is unexpected, filled with inexplicable connections and wild leaps of logic. The Moog never fails to bring out the unique authorial voice of The Ra. **My Brother the Wind, ECD 22040-2 (Saturn LP 523)**, track 'The Wind Speaks' is a 1970 moog solo; as is 'Scene 1 Take 1' on *The Solar-Myth Approach Vol 2*, on Actuel and reissued as AFF 76.

Nuits de La Fondation Maeght, Recommended

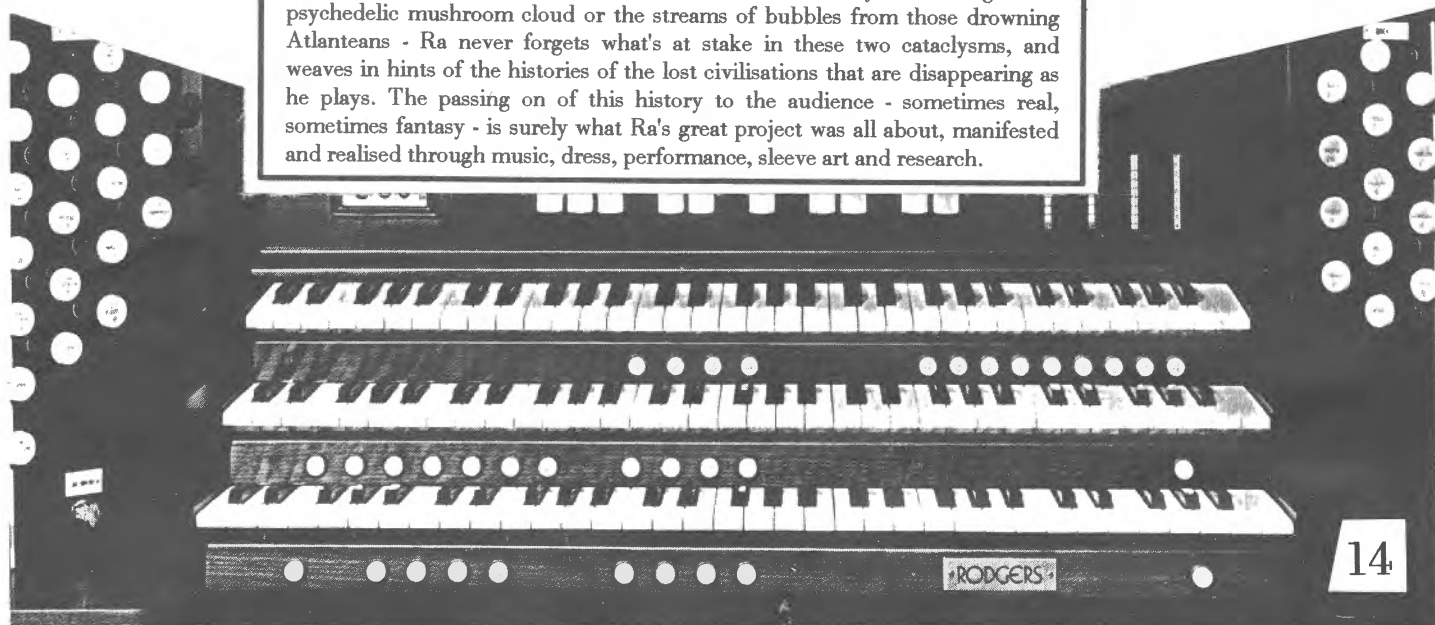
RR 11 - side 2 is 'The Cosmic Explorer', a 1970 moog solo which Chris Cutler aptly describes as 'Concordes crashing and vacuum cleaners plaited into music'. Nuff said. A sustained abstract meditation which documents Sun Ra's total one-ness with his chosen instrument. Shame it's out of print at the moment.

Cosmic Tones for Mental Therapy, ECD 22036 (Saturn LP

408) - Whoah! Essential for any self-respecting human being who's equipped with ears. On 'And Otherness' Ra plays the Clavioline (as used by Joe Meek), a French monophonic electronic keyboard that was almost antiquated as soon as the first model rolled off the conveyor belt. 'Voice of Space' features Ra on the astro space organ. The word 'eerie' doesn't have enough letter Es in it to convey the supernatural power of these keyboard segments, let alone the whole recording!

Out There a Minute, Blast First BFFP 42 was a very affordable and accessible LP which Paul Smith issued in 1989, revealing the tinkly clavinet solo on 'Love in Outer Space' and the echoed organ and piano weirdness of 'Song and Tree and Forest'.

I've heard the *Hiroshima* organ solo on a bootleg tape of a Saturn recording. Of course it resembles a cinema Wurlitzer organ, and I don't care if that's too corny for some listeners. Ra is watching his own personal silent film of the apocalypse brought down by the Atomic Bomb, and here's his musical commentary on it, intuitive and reactive. Take **Atlantis (ECD 22067, Saturn LP 507)**, of which the title track was a side-long 21 minute 'solar sound organ' solo. He uses it more like a paintbox than a musical instrument. It is possible to read both performances as linear stories in sound, soundtracks to accompany these mind-movies of devastation. Yet it's not just revelling in the psychedelic mushroom cloud or the streams of bubbles from those drowning Atlanteans - Ra never forgets what's at stake in these two cataclysms, and weaves in hints of the histories of the lost civilisations that are disappearing as he plays. The passing on of this history to the audience - sometimes real, sometimes fantasy - is surely what Ra's great project was all about, manifested and realised through music, dress, performance, sleeve art and research.





**Magnog, Chicago
Kranky, Krank 010
(1996)**

**Hovercraft, *akathisia*,
Blast Kirst BFFP 135 CD
(1997)**

Two recent-ish examples of so-called US SpaceRock, a new strain in the bloodstream, instrumental improvised rock, heavily influenced by Kosmische Rock and Prog, very discursive - ie long-winded. I understand this is linked to a rediscovery in the USA of the value of playing antique and analogue instruments. Magnog I enjoy, despite an overall chill of gloomy fog over this recorded set, the band shelter under a tarpaulin and patiently work their flints until their improvisations catch a fire. The length, and dare it be said, self-indulgence of these recordings to my mind surpasses anything actually put to vinyl during the era to which they pay homage; as yet I've not found an original 1970s record as flabby or turgid, but I'd be delighted to be proved wrong. Magnog like the trendy analogue synthesizer sound, which nowadays requires not only that you use such instruments, you proudly advertise it in the credits department. They also favour the good old 12-string acoustic guitar (Dana Shinn), tape delay guitar solos (Phil Drake) and prove themselves capable of an occasional folksy lyric. Astounding sleeve art - the invasion of the X-Rays over a spruce tree, and good use of the gatefold format (wasted in the interior, sadly).

Hovercraft (from Seattle USA) are I'm afraid even more discursive, but if there's a tip of the hat to Pink Floyd (the crinkly guitar scratchings are straight from 'Astronomy Domine'), this is tempered by a sneering and nihilistic attitude informed by punk rock, Grunge and Seattle post-rock. While they create some interesting enough moments, it wouldn't have hurt them to employ a little editing somewhere. Did every moment of their improv'd sessions cry out to be issued? At best

they can draw you into their circle, like mumbling primitives, and let you share in the ceremony up to a point; the nagging repetition of the limited guitar-driven sound can at times induce a numbness akin to a basic form of mesmerism - like brain surgery performed with a wooden club. At worst, the dingbat snare drum riffs are so basic as to remind you of The Doors on a off-day doing a highly-extended version of 'The End'. Hovercraft ignore dynamics - while they can struggle from one moment of the improvisation to the next quite convincingly, they lack a decent concept of their overall shape and direction, so we end up with formless chattering that merely transport us from one side of the sofa to the other. Where (for example) Ash Ra Tempel would proceed from monotony to lift you up to the stars, Hovercraft can only gaze at the Milky Way reflected in their tiny mud puddle. Don't fall for



the superficial packaging - the booklet's use of old *Scientific American* photos is verging on a cliché (better stop doing it myself!); and using names like Campbell 2000 and Karl 3.30 merely make them sound silly, not mysterious.

**Soft Machine, *Spaced*,
USA Cuneiform Records,
Rune 90 (1996)**

An excellent 'rescued' item, *Spaced* was commissioned for a special happening at the Roundhouse in 1969, as part of the (ahem) thriving London Underground scene at that time, which might put it in a league with Conrad Schnitzler's pieces for art galleries, or perhaps the Pyramid label records which we look at elsewhere. Note that it is not a live recording as such, rather a series of treated tapes to be used as background sounds. Here be the classic line up of Ratledge, Hopper and Wyatt, with added input from Brian Hopper on horns, a winning combo which could do little wrong. Soft Machine are well represented on their studio records, but I wonder if some listeners write them off as a fluffy English Psyche Canterbury

scene combo? *Spaced* shows another vital side to them - dark and aggressive, in places verging on the chaotic, with a real bite and attack behind every minute of it. I hear a similar thing in one of my live bootlegs of the Softs, it's remarkable what power they summon up with just a trio of instruments. Particularly this must be due to Ratledge's work with his pedals and keyboard, both hands and feet brought into play in that very physical interlocking with his instrument, demonstrating his virtuoso control over volumes, textures, timing - pure abstract sound battles it out with brutal noise, and lovely melodies played at top speed by his nimble digits. Wyatt is thrashing out an urgent time signature on the high hat, Hopper's bass just slides in like blobs of black treacle, and Ratledge sometimes simply sketches in the tune when he can. Only one fragment of a tune is familiar to these ears, and that radically reworked in the effortless way Ratledge was always so good at - as though he

could play it in his sleep and was almost impatiently dispensing with the melodic component, so he could proceed to the more important substance of improvisation, and the deep interrogation of chords and sounds. The icing on the cake is the

lovely post-production interventions - carried out on quite primitive equipment it seems - including liberal use of backwards tapes, a device I can never hear enough of. Also proto-sampling, a track where their recording of 'I Did it Again' is crudely spliced in with new material, the rough tape edits creating an exciting abrasive effect. This work was done by Bob Woolford, who has also provided sleeve notes on how he made these loops. 'Rediscovery' projects of this kind are more than welcome, as they add another dimension to your understanding of a band infinitely.

Big Stick, *Pro Drag*, New York Pow Wow Records, PWD 7456 (1995)

Last time I dug these two genius freaks - John Gill and Yanna Trance - they were sporting childish skin tattoos and gothic masks with their big hair on the cover of a fine Blast First package that yoked *Drag Racing with Crack Attack*. Those were two excellent, extremely idiosyncratic records of the 1980s and should be used as the starting point for a musical argument about, eg, the potential uses of sampling and editing by any thinking person. Now listen to what they're up to! A candy coloured engine cover wraps the joyous din that is *Pro Drag*, where they still play like four year-olds with drum machines and guitars cranked up to unfeasible volumes and strummed in basic Link Wray style; the whole disc overlapping with all kinds of twisted ideas. Gone are the heart-stopping jump edits of the vocal lines, but in their place is a cast of grotesques delineated with uncanny talent by our ingenious duo of performance artists - like a viciously satirical radio play set to music. Among the individuals here is a Southern Gospel preacher on 'Raccoon River', the epitome of the Robert Mitchum preacherman in *Night of the Hunter* reflected in a distorting mirror. On 'Panther' a warped Jane Fonda workout motivator breathlessly wallows in her power over men - 'You're lucky to have sex with me!' No less demented is the scenario of Girls on the Toilet, glossy soft porn images warped into a nightmarish setting.

Having made a performance art comparison, I would now like to retract it - Karen Finley or Anne Magnusson are far too wordy and clever in comparison to the lyrical directness of Big Stick, their economy of means, their throwaway flippancy, their sheer sleaze...all attitude-rich qualities to be admired. For the booklet, put your sunglasses on and scope the tinted photograph of the pair, brilliantly posed / composed and juxtaposed with a Wheel of Fortune - it's a masterpiece of ironic kitschy trash, and almost sums up the key to this project. They've got style! - pouring off them like great gobs of maple syrup off a stack of hot pancakes. Dig in!



Swans, *Soundtracks for the Blind*, Young God Records YG01 (ALP 59) CD (1996)

Monumental! This record's a living sculpture in bronze about 200 feet across, an epic sprawl over two long discs (identified simply as Silver CD and Copper CD). Clearly not every single second of this meisterwerk radiates the same level of intensity - some songs lapse quickly into Wagnerian pomp and dreariness - but there are passages which are indelible and lasting. The best pieces for me are those which eschew traditional linear song development, and aim simply for the manifestation of a ghostly noise - perhaps fashioned from loops or abstract drones, rich in textures and evoking spectacular Byzantine designs. Layers of spectral sounds reveal

themselves gradually, every fine detail rendered with a stern conviction, like the roof bosses of a cathedral. 'Surrogate Drone' draws you in for what seems like hours, only to end with a sharp cut-off making the music continue inside your head. Such moments can generate such unearthly feelings that it's almost a disappointment when they return to the song format, the familiar dirge-like grumblings of Gira or the harsh monosyllabic barkings of Jarboe. Dotted throughout this infinite landscape are selected tape samplings which could be the ramblings of a menacing loon or the sufferings of a hospital patient; one of them is Gira's father describing the aftermath of his eye operation. Instrumental titles also

evoke our sympathy and dread in equal amounts - 'How They Suffer'. But there are no longer any shock-tactics or deliberate attempts to repulse the listener with Swans; all that's left is their colossal weariness with the inexplicable miseries of the world, and the futile search for compassion and warmth in the glacial environment of the late 20th century. The clouds and bone-orchard sleeve art offers little comfort. 'The Final Sac', almost a Frank Sinatra showbiz farewell song reminds you this is Swans final recording; and perhaps Gira's reply to those who ask 'Why are you stopping', is simply 'I was a Prisoner in your skull!' Give these artists

their tribute and prepare for a cathartic 140 minutes.

Skullflower, *This is Skullflower* CD, VHF#23

Total, *The Starlit Mire I-IV* EP

Splendid recordings of juicy, messy improvised noise from these Cumbria based fellows. *The Starlit Mire* EP is a real gem, four live tracks edited from longer improves, a simple duo of John Godbert blowing his eerie horns over some calm plateaux of plangent guitar feedback from partner Matthew Bower. The CD includes a full-on rockish combo with some interesting dissonant piano lines. Only the drummer Stuart Dennison

occasionally stands out as being a little too regular on the pulse in the otherwise unpredictable melange; I'd say they need more of a Sunny Murray approach to do them justice. Richard Youngs, a true joker in the pack of the UK's improv - alternative - weirdo scene, joins them for one track. Why aren't Skullflower - who seem to have been around for a number of years now - more visible? Well, there's so much compartmentalising in this country, I guess they're considered not 'pure' enough in some way to count as part of the establishment improvising scene (which is also unfortunately rather Londoncentric in some ways). On the other hand if they show up at rock venues and do what they do, the reaction from your average drunken student wouldn't be too hard to guess. Apparently Skullflower count it a success if they can get to the end of a gig without being asked to stop! Well, not by this listener who could cheerfully listen to such music till the wheat is eaten. *Starlit Mire* is part of their Rural Electrification Programme, which must be welcome news to farmers in the Cumbria area. It features a beautiful sleeve drawing reminiscent of the work of illustrator John Buckland-Wright.

ZGA, *Sub Luna Morrior*, ReR ZGA 3 (1995)

Great music, but the colour paintings reproduced in the booklet are one of the best features of this package - treat your eyeballs to a mutant strain of peasant folk art. It's all peacocks, stars, fish, dogs, suns and trees, rendered in simple Marc Chagall / Henri Matisse mode with bright poster paint colours. Perhaps this music - recorded in St Petersburg by the trio of Latvian eccentrics Nick Sudrich, Scarlett and Michael Jedenick - is also a mutant strain of eastern European folk. You can detect a whiff of the vodka-and-peppercorns in their balalaika imitations and the danceable clarinet melodies. Principally however these jolly tunes are rendered via the medium of the bash. A challenge with using so many percussion instruments as a team, is working to avoid the 4/4 trap, striving not to lapse into automatic rhythms. This is something The Residents are guilty of in their later period (eg Mark of the Mole). However, ZGA deploy very unusual home-made percussion devices, and

come close to being a toy version of the Gate 5 Ensemble; that is when they're not sharing with us their wonderful sound-memories of the scissor factories back in the old country. Although they can plod in places, ZGA have a sense of playfulness as evinced by their use of toys - Eugene Chadbourne would approve, I suspect - and nursery rhyme-like lyrics, such as on the track 'Hedgehog in the Pocket' which lopes along like a one-legged organ grinder with an entire string of monkeys in tow. Compare with the almost totally abstract 'Right Side of the Left', where the band attempt to do their laundry in a clapped-out cast iron washing machine only to find the water pump has run dry. This one deserves your attention. They debuted on CD in 1991, thanks to the good efforts of Chris Cutler.

Gastr Del Sol, *Upgrade and Afterlife*, Chicago Drag City DC90 CD (1996)

Wonderful stuff this - though it wasn't an immediate grabber, I now deem it a highly crafted recording exhibiting consummate studio skill, very listenable, and a pleasingly deft combination of the story (songs) with the abstract (instrumentals). Jim O'Rourke is one half of this duo, which is why I decided to investigate - on the strength of his work with Faust. People can sometimes spout nonsense about 'imaginary movie soundtracks'. More apposite to a record like this is the phrase 'Movie for your Ears', coined by Frank Zappa for his 1969 LP *Hot Rats*. Zappa's proposal for



making records this way should have been followed by more musicians, I feel. (Notwithstanding the 'Cinema of the Ear' series of music concrète minidisks issued by Metam Kine in France; O'Rourke did one called *Rules of Reduction*, MKCD 009.) This Gastr record seems to have a shot at it. More than simply suggesting suitable cinematic images to accompany itself, it (like *Hot Rats*) pays close attention to light and shade, tonal colour balance, textures, and a highly developed feel for the linear progression of the whole recording - it's edited and ordered like a cinematic event, not just a loose affiliation of episodes (which isn't to say it's like a 1970s concept album in any way!). This is helped by the brilliant move of playing a John Fahey composition as the final track, played with loving care by O'Rourke and overlaid with lusciously managed sounds including the great Tony Conrad playing a slightly more approachable version of his minimal violin drones. Elsewhere the bizarre fragmentary songs delivered with a hesitant breathy vocal over a close-miked acoustic classical guitar evoke The Red Krayola. And the first track starts with a tasty chandelier-shattering organ chord, which edits into a sample of that brilliant melancholy trumpet solo from *The Incredible Shrinking Man*. This CD is undeniably precious and fragile, but so what?

**Kletka Red,
Hijacking, TZADIK TZ
7111**

This arrived from Amsterdam to convince me there's still a healthy scene for performers of improv and free music on the European circuit - why for the price of an open rail ticket you could see the great Han Bennink perform every night! Here, Leonid Soybelman is joined by Andy Ex on

2nd guitar and they tear through a suite of souped-up traditional Jewish dance and folk music on electric guitars and drums. All part of John Zorn's bid to reclaim Jewish heritage and rekindle it for the modern age, don't you know. Zorn himself isn't personally involved here, something of a plus for this listener who found *Spy Vs Spy* (Ornette Coleman melodies rethought as Hardcore Metal) a case of overegging the pudding. Instead we have a lively buncha ditties sounding like The Magic Band on amphetamines, guaranteed to make every night a stomping celebration in your home - don't blame me if you get glass slivers in your feet.

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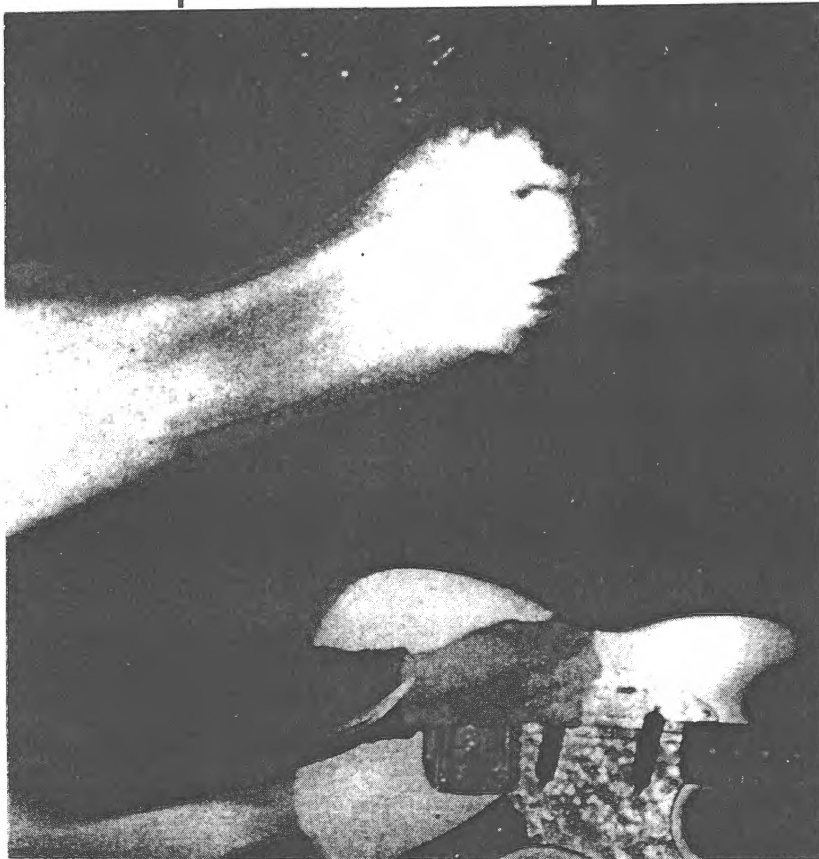
clogging up the bookshops, or even the inevitable tawdry reunions. Instead the unsentimental glare of hindsight reveals the '76 moment more as a storm in an entertainment teacup than a revolution. Punk's tired orthodoxy of 'outrage' was ultimately limiting, with nowhere to go but louder, faster and shorter. As for the polemic, to make a claim today for rock-at-the-barricades revisionism would be as foolish as strutting round Safeway's in the guerilla-combat threads Joe Strummer once wore.

Vic Godard's Subway Sect were there at the start but never joined the foot-thru-the-TV first division. The ripped'n'torn scenesters who viewed The Sect at the 100 Club's seminal Punk Festival were maybe confused by their perverse school-pullover non-image. Not for Vic and the boys

the marketable punk pantomime of The Damned or Siouxsie Sue's Weimar glam-shockery. Note their leader's surname was (possibly) filched from a French film auteur rather than a skin disease or brand of noxious glue. If Subway Sect's approach was more oblique, artpunk maybe, then neither can they be linked with the po-faced minimalism of Wire. It's the group's impossible to pin down singularity

which makes this compilation so chock full of enduring thrills and twists of style.

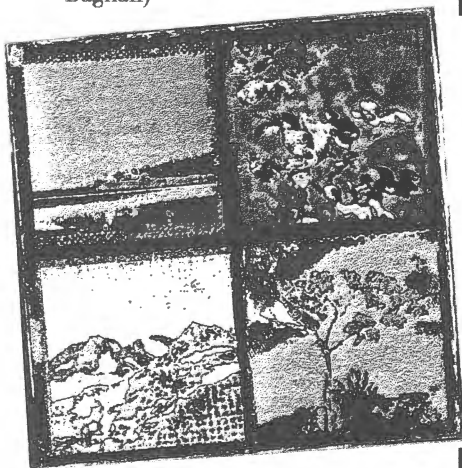
Certainly the first four cuts could come from no other period or place than the uptight, grimy mire of the capital in '76. But amidst the visceral cheap-speed squall are strands of John Cale one-note piano, '65 Beat Group harmonica and enticing interludes of crashing atonality. The compressed



**Subway Sect, We
Oppose all Rock & Roll,
Overground OVER 35CD**

The class of '76 somehow lost its flavour on the bedpost. Twenty years on the mewling spurts of The Clash, Pistols and the rest defy any attempts at re-kindling by ear. It's not the creaking weight of spiky-top history

screech of 'Nobody's Scared' and 'Don't Split it' are worth prominent shelf space alone, but the more crafted 'Ambition' soon follows. The Godard persona unfolds here - a barrow-boy nihilist spitting impenetrable syntax ('Blind Alleyways allay the jewels') via a weasel throat-grafting of Marc Bolan and Peter Perrett. A Peel session cover of The Velvet's 'Head Held High' sets the tone for their maturing sound, wry, cool and uptempo with Lou Reed transplanted to the shabby, crumbling streets of King's Cross. 'Stool Pigeon' careers joyously and the cheeky Jean Genie swagger of 'Watching the Devil' is fine but watch out, the oncoming spectre of 80s pop mars 'Stop that Girl' with its horrible mellifluous bass and suave accordion. Gladly the retrospective bows out before Vic went totally cocktail (another typically perverse act) and so stands as an 80% perfect testament to an undervalued group. Pigeon-holing rock historians take note! (John Bagnall)



Tim Foljahn, *Four Seasons* tape

A compelling C90s worth of home-made guitar drones, very much in the Velvet tradition, but none the worse for that. Simply achieved through lots of drone and digital delay, and sounds like it could have been done in one take. Sometimes an exercise like this can result in a tapeload of unlistenable sludge, but Tim pulls it off with the help of simple melodic frameworks; he leaves in the rough edges that give it human expression, nor does he depart from the realms of the perfect note once having locked in on it. Dronework can be like landscape painting; playing this, you can almost breathe the grimy Brooklyn atmosphere recreated before you, gritty skies and belching

chimneys. A cheerful package that sends up Wyndham Hill New Age records.

*From Old
Gold Records,
PO Box 8776,
Atlanta, GA
30306, USA*

Palace Music, *Arise Therefore, Domino WIG* CD 24 (1996)

From the Will Oldham and Steve Albini team that gave us the wonderful Palace Brothers *There is No-One what will take care of You*, and many other records besides. I guess I value Oldham's achievements as a writer first - and not necessarily a songwriter, I leave it to the experts to judge if these are great songs or not - they are certainly electrifying stories. The style of discourse - beyond 'spare' or 'minimal', puts me in mind of fave US writers Raymond Carver (naturally) and Michael Ondaatje's *Billy the Kid* - perhaps to a certain extent James Ellroy even. I mean the relentless accumulation of unpleasant detail, accurate and fatal, delivered with steely precision like an icicle in the ear. As to the content of these dark tales, I remain largely baffled and intrigued at this stage, despite the inclusion of a complete lyric book. What dark areas of psychological warfare he is probing. Uncomfortable observations, pinpointing weaknesses in his characters' situations with prescient accuracy. The second track hints at a horrifying story of primitive backwoods magic, performed with unthinking cruelty and certainty by rural inbred monsters way beyond *Deliverance*. Stephen King could only hope to delineate his material with such economy; Oldham gives us the story (as always) in carefully chosen broken images.

We dig Palace Music 100% but can see how some listeners might fall at the first post. To begin with, the singing is sometimes just a notch above a recitative, almost a poetry reading, with occasional concessions to repeating a note or two in the 'melody'. And the sound of the record is brutally spartan, even those who regularly listen to bootleg demos of their fave bands will have a tough time with this record. A lazy listener would deem it of the 'lo-fi' school. It might sound careless and sketchy, the voice at times

barely more than an obscure whimper, struggling over a strumming electric guitar rhythm, in which murky mix the drum machine intrudes like an unwanted knock at the door or rattling of the shutters in a storm; and the slide guitar so thoughtlessly dropped in, it dances like a clumsy 8-foot hillbilly drunk on moonshine. Truly, Palace Music come closest of any rock combo to achieving the stark, ascetic quality of, say, early Country Music or rural Blues records. Traces of emotion in the delivery have been leeches away - none of your James Brown histrionics here thank you - which isn't to say these songs are unemotional, but the power is transferred quietly and with assurance.

Azalia Snail, *Escape Maker, Garden of Delights (Privately pressed)*

With help of the Portastudio Andrea B. plays multi-tracked guitar lines and sings distorted vocals, with all the rough edges and 'mistakes' of overlapping takes kept in the final product. (Disc cutters apparently refused to handle it due to the harsh edits and 'wrong' signal to noise ratio - a factor common to The Residents' records). This take-it-as-it-comes aesthetic lends the record a strange charm. Basic modal chord structures remind one of how eg The Sun Dial or Rain Parade have shown what is possible with psychedelia, it can be highly effective when slowed to a snail's pace (how fitting!). Just occasionally the repetition can become a nagging nuisance which doesn't really progress - but more often than not it plugs into that universal need for a good looping drone, and delivers a useful contribution. The fact that it is a girl playing cannot be overlooked entirely, it's a real plus factor, since she never lapses into familiar ego-driven guitar solo postures as boy guitar hero amateurs can sometimes do. Likewise proving you can do solo songs without coming too close to Cocteau Twins bedsit-land, although sometimes the lyrics start off somewhere in the over-personal diary entry mode, each song finishes in another more intense and powerful dimension. I'm also delighted to see that 'home-made' records are still an option in these days of strident professional commercialism.

**Fantasy Factory,
Tales to Tell, Munich
Ohrwaschl OWR 09
(1997)**

Arrgh, this looked ghastly at first sight of its hippy colour-spiral sleeve! At least it doesn't pretend to be anything other than what it is, a retro treat for the legions of Prog-Rock diehards on this dark continent. Even the press release does all the nostalgic namechecking for you (Floyd, Tull et al). Although little more than an ego-trip for Englishman abroad Alan Tepper, this CD is surprisingly listenable when he shuts his mouth (he's an abominable singer) and plays the guitar, and when he cuts loose on the frets he's every bit as good as The Bevis Frond.

**Hash Jar Tempo, Well
Oiled, California
Drunken Fish DFR-24
(1997)**

Certainly NOT the meeting of great minds this purports to be - US introverts Bardo Pond jamming good with visiting NZ axeman Roy Montgomery - this CD nonetheless delivers about 40-50% playable material. The opening cut is sloppy boneless psych, from a distance resembling the ghost of Link Wray played at quarter-speed, yet with a naggingly insistent weight to it; the fourth track comes closer to the near-chaotic incoherence and lock-groove droning which I demand, despite the silly drummer's efforts to turn it into 'Careful with that Axe Eugene', thankfully that sidesman is relegated to tea-boy status in the mix. The remaining cuts are either too melodic, or too ambient. Montgomery is not a man I trust yet, in interviews he comes over as a glib opportunist - but I'm prejudiced agin Kiwis anyhow!

**Destroy All Monsters,
Silver Wedding
Anniversary, Sympathy
for the Record Industry
SFTRI 444**

Rock reunions are usually events to be approached with caution as, nine times out of ten, the magic that caused the original thrill fails to show up on-stage. The Velvet Underground reformation was one classic example of this, where

a hallowed band with cult status of near supernatural dimensions were dwarfed by a bad venue (Wembley Arena), bad sound and Lou Reed's bad attitude which forced him to rework the simplicity of a song like 'Some Kinda Love' and transform it into MTV styled pop mediocrity. Thankfully this kind of behaviour was absent at Destroy All Monsters's '95 *Silver Wedding Anniversary* bash, a trio of gigs which took place in Detroit and California last summer featuring the original fine arts line up of Mike Kelley, Cary Loren, Jim Shaw and Niagara, together with a horde of various guest musicians and assorted noise makers. DAM may not have been as popular as The VU were in their heyday, but this Detroit improvisation unit's reputation was just as legendary amongst those who had stumbled down the slippery stairs of the band's psychedelic basement where they rehearsed and recorded their outsider version of rock'n'roll. Destroy All Monsters poured the solar spirit of Sun Ra and the rabid sonic assault of The Stooges into the same cracked and dented electric music blender and whipped up a cocktail that was both toxic and intoxicating. Psychedelic improvisation for the mind and body was illuminated by a bad trip exhibition of lava lamp shadow puppetry that sent a shudder of disbelief and distrust down the spine of audiences whose musical taste was either brown rice or prime rib. Thus a version of Roy Orbison's 'In Dreams' is as much a tribute to film director David Lynch as to the Big O, a theme that expands as their set trawls through uncharted oceans of sound. Occasionally they drop anchor to surrealistically salute such popular song icons as Roberta Flack, Jon Anderson and (subliminally) Kiss, but then the band return to the dark, deep and dangerous swell of freeform and freak out. This sound souvenir of the Monsters's reunion tour acts as a neat addendum to their impressive three CD boxed history which came out a couple of years ago, Here the band may be older, wiser and (especially in Mike Kelley's case) wealthier, but the experiences they shared together and the rich seam of experimentation they discovered through each other remains untarnished by time.
(Edwin Pouncey)

**MX-80, Das Love Boat:
Instrumentals 1975 -
1990, US a&r/ENT
CD027 [1990]**

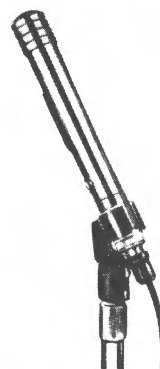
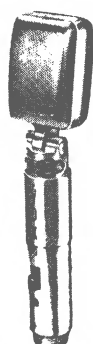
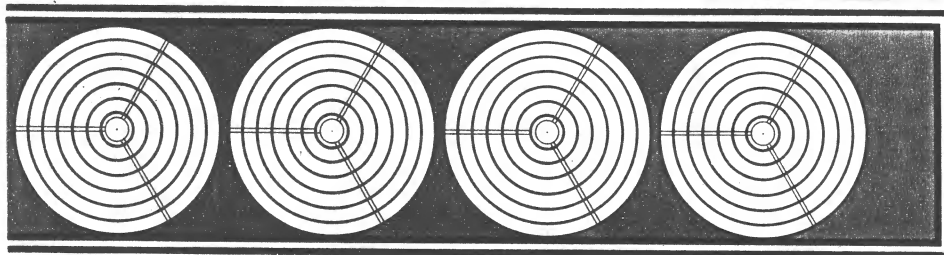
MX-80 Sound have been dropping clues about their secret second lives as undercover agents since the beginning of their career: the photos on the sleeve of *Hard Attack* caught them in the middle of a dangerous musical experiment gone wrong, *Out of the Tunnel* showed their satellite dish logo sending coded signals to Thunderbird 5 just prior to nuclear meltdown, and snippets of themes from shows like *Mission: Impossible* would often creep into their otherwise hard-edged brand of rock'n'roll (clearly they see industrial espionage as light relief from their musical activities). This CD, a compilation of instrumentals spanning 15 years of their career, finally blows the whistle. Without the distraction of Rich Stim's great dry vocals, the



influence of music from classic American movies and TV shows is plain to hear, not just in the covers like 'Theme from Batman', but shot throughout their originals. Not only do MX-80 spy behind the Iron Curtain, they direct traffic in downtown Chicago, nip across to Gotham City whenever the Bat-signal is activated and spend their spare time hot on the heels of a serial killer or two. And no-one plays guitar like the guys from MX-80 - they switch fluidly between edgy power chords and surf-guitar finger-picking in a way that's nigh-on impossible to replicate by other hands (just try it, guitar-playing readers!) and this technique almost certainly helps shape their peculiar songs. In the more recent material they've widened their range to include slow numbers, making strong use of a chorus pedal, the kind of effect that The Cure lean upon in lieu of a good song - in MX-80's hands however it's just another item in their Bat Utility Belt.
(Harley Richardson)

Mosshed Of Improvisation

The Sound Projector 2nd issue 1997



Sand, *Ultrasonic Seraphim*, UDOR 2/3 CD (1996)

Yet more treasures from the heritage of German rock. What an amazing collection. This one has been salvaged from oblivion by the efforts of David Tibet, and a real labour of love it's proved to be: transferred from vinyl so as to provide their 1973 LP *Golem* in toto. It used the 'Artificial Head' recording technique which endeavoured to give 'an illusion of perfect surrounding space'. Needless to say this effect did not translate to vinyl with complete success. Sand split after this first record. *Born at Dawn*, also on this CD, was an unreleased 1975 solo project by mainman Johannes Vester. There are also unreleased versions of songs from *Golem*.

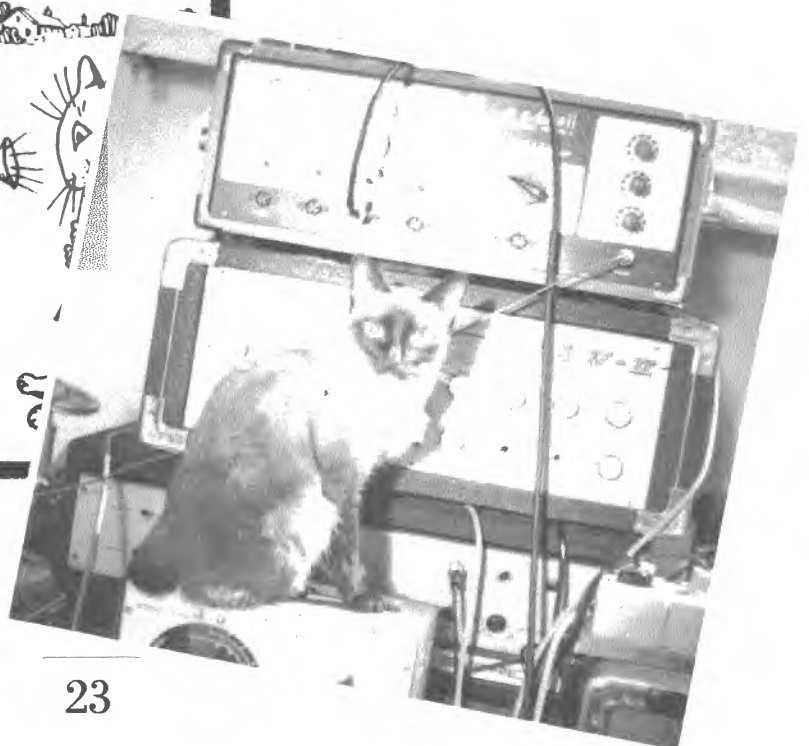
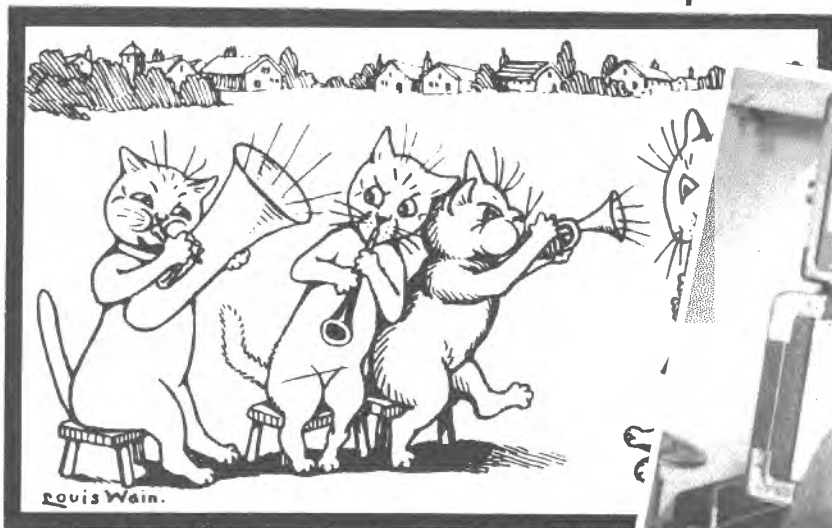
To these ears Sand are the closest thing to the great Blue Oyster Cult that ever came out of the Krautrock scene. They are surely the alchemists who 'see with their eyes closed'. 'Old Loggerhead', for example, a tale of a grotesque loner with supernatural undertones, sings of a character twisted enough to be the evil twin of BOC's 'The Inhuman', say. 'Actually, long ago, he is dead...' chants the dirge-like lyric, delivering the bewildering payoff to a litany of Loggerhead's attributes and achievements. Other song tales give me glimpses of castles, princesses, travelling hucksters and strange journeys, hinting at the fairytale aspects of BOC's unreleased Stalk Forrest LP *St Cecilia*. 'When the May Rain Comes', along with the unrelenting desert imagery that seems to crop up subliminally in each song, connects us to 'Then Came The Last Days of May'. Melodically, many tunes come within an ace of the eastern-tinged 'She's As Beautiful as a Foot'. And Sand's generous use of the A Minor chord as a key setting for so many of Sand's songs would not be unappreciated by Albert Bouchard!

Of course, Sand have many other strings to their bow, including an overdeveloped sense of the power of the diabolical drone. This is particularly noticeable on 'Helicopter', where having found a groove that works they

explore it way further and for longer than many lesser men would manage. A choppy rhythm guitar fed thro wah-wah, and a loud, deep organ chord resonate together, generating their own oscillating vibrations, shaking the very bones of those musicians who dare to play them - and shattering the minds of those who dare to listen. There's a driven, ritual quality to these performances that's almost frightening, something so rarely captured on record.

Does anyone remember La Dissidenten? John Peel used to play their records regularly, they too used a similar Eastern scale of notation (very close intervals) which Sand seem to favour, perhaps a certain East European influence creeping in to certain parts of Germany (recall Bowie's 'Neuköln' recorded in Berlin, his hamfisted attempt to make his saxophone emulate Turkish folk melodies). Where La Dissidenten were upbeat and joyous, Sand provide a terrifying downer of an experience, crawling back to sanity from a hideous acid trip, along the lines of Dom's *End of Time*. But Dom seemed to have gained something from the trip, where Sand just appear to be resigned to their doom.

Tibet's personal attachment to this record is shared warmly with the purchaser of this CD, in a stirring story where he describes his driven passion to realise this project, coming across like a man possessed - which can only be a good thing. This release can also serve as a barometer of the manifestation of Krautrock in the United Kingdom in the 1970s - when Virgin Megastores had their German Rock sections overflowing with precious booty - and Steve Stapleton's pioneering work in collecting it. Such local history is of interest to a novice like myself. Early issues of this release came with a CD single (UDOR 4 CD) featuring Current 93 playing their version of 'When the May Rain Comes'. The cat illo by Louis Wain (venerated by Tibet) on its cover salutes the Electronic Cat photographed in the Sand inlay, a Siamese beauty feeding off the electrical current from a pulsing old amplifier until her eyes glow. A similar metamorphosis awaits any listener brave enough to venture into the dark universe of Sand!



'My Strange Life'

**Florian Fricke
interview by
Edwin Pouncey**



Florian talks to Edwin Pouncey at his Munich home 1 December 1995. Gerhard Augustin is also present. Due to sound quality of the tape, and the fact that English is not Florian's first language, much information has been conjectured and supplied in square brackets. The same goes for Gerhard's occasional interpolations, which have been incorporated into Florian's speeches.

FF You have a saying in England 'no news is good news!' For me also! When I go to the studio, I never look in the letterbox, because it gives a bad feeling before [work]. And after the studio, it's also not possible, because I'm too tired, and I like to listen to music...

EP Do you have a superstition about that? Bad news might mess you about, affect your music.

FF I'm not a football player! I have to go with a good feeling to the studio. When I go with a bad feeling to the studio I spend some [...] ...it's not possible, it's not good for the team, because some other people are not so happy then. So I don't ever look at the letterbox!

EP What effect did Egypt have on your music, playing it there?

FF It brought me an inspiring day! One day...that's enough. I know what I want and what I have to do. I like a joke! If you want to tell someone you know how it goes, you want to show someone your direction and impose it on them...sometimes a joke is better, to see it from the funny end.

I used to listen to short-wave radio, to Oriental and Indian music. The time I bought this [radio] I have tears, because I was so happy to listen to the whole world. It's strange for my parents, because they [disapproved].

My intention with Popol Vuh is to keep the soul in tune with time! In tune...on each level: a mystic level, a political level. I'm quoting from the bible....some people ask me, do I like philosophy. I say, not any more. But I'm doing the things that are closest to me, that I feel closest to. That has always been my contemporary philosophy, so my philosophy changes with circumstances.

EP Those early records as well had a very deep spiritual, nature feel about them.

GA Have you ever been in England, Florian?

FF Yes, I was very early in London in the 1960s...I met some people, the Crazy World of Arthur Brown. The London 'underground' [scene]...the Pink Floyd.

EP Did you see Yoko in her gallery?

FF No - it was private. It was terrible. The doors had no locks on them; there was a chair. The chair was half. I had claustrophobia. I need closed doors. And so the first doors I (whoosh) opened them up and then no possible more come out this terrible woman out of the room.

EP That half-chair was one of her exhibits.

FF No, it was part of the interview. For my wife. She was *Stern* Magazine photographer. I was accompanying my wife. Later I write the words to it. This time I was looking at London. It was crazy. Every corner, somebody was standing, with new ideas about religion, or blah blah blah! My son likes London, for me it's too much!

EP For everybody it's too much. I think London is like... you either love it or can't bear it.

The story of *Affenstunde*

EP That first record you made, you used a huge Moog synthesizer, Was that record designed for that instrument? Was the Moog bought first, then you thought - make a Moog Sound record?

GA I should tell you the story. Before I came to United Artists in Germany I was working with UA in America and live in San Francisco, and I had worked with David Brown from Santana, on a Moog Synthesizer. So I came to Germany and I was specifically looking for someone in Germany that would have that kind of instrument. There were two people: Eberhard Schoener and Florian Fricke, who also happened to be direct neighbours out in the country. House to house! The only two people in Germany

Until today this is his most legendary album, of all the albums he did, just because it was so new, so different. It was done for the purpose of making a Moog Synthesizer [record]. At the beginning people did not accept it. Today we have had at least 55 different releases, in different countries and different labels. And other people have sampled this!

FF It was a fantastic journey to learn this Moog synthesizer. I didn't have any papers - there was no manual for how to run that machine! He was angry [?]...Robert Moog who invented the Moog. It was a strange beautiful journey.

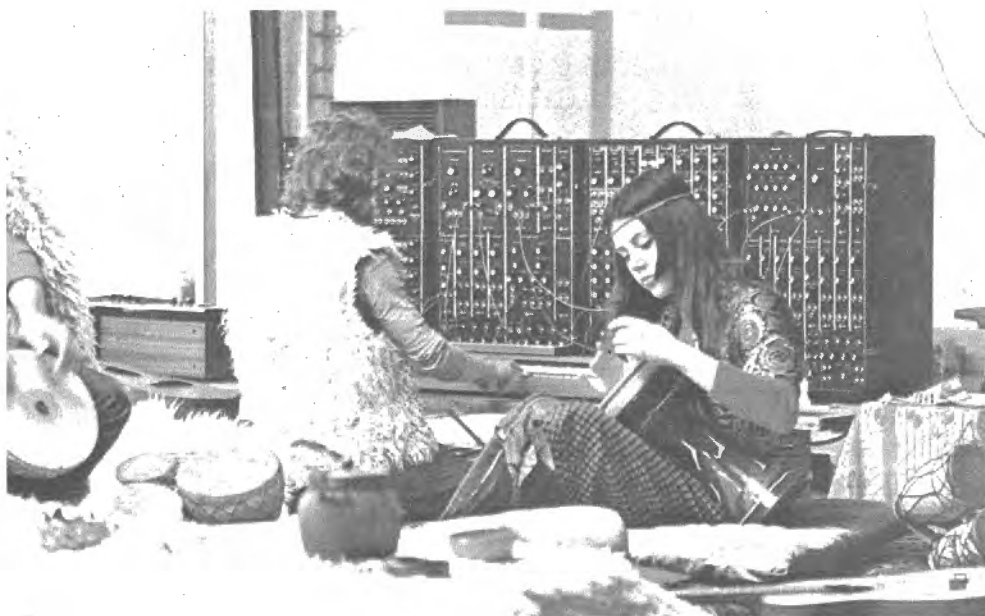
EP So you were improvising on this mysterious instrument, for which you had no manual to operate...you were discovering sounds for yourself on that machine.

FF We have made, day and night, music! I was always playing. I was working almost around the clock. Whenever I

didn't sleep, I was just experimenting, trying to find...Frank Fiedler was a very important man, especially at this time, he was there from the beginning. Later I come back to my old roots, back to the piano. I was learning piano music at high school. I was a good Mozart player.

EP I'd very much like to hear that record.

FF Gerhard will play it for you. The first piece is not so good, After that I'm very happy about it. I had only two days in which to make it.



who had this very expensive instrument! A Moog Synthesizer was 65,000 Marks at the time. So I had this idea of doing an album. There was another guy - Walter Carlos...

FF [He did it] just before. This was a record of Bach [for the synthesizer]...

GA We wanted to make an album, to create new sounds. Because I envisioned the possibilities of that instrument on a long run. I knew that it would eventually take its place alongside other instruments, by the ability to create certain technical sounds, which until that time were not possible. That's where he (Florian) came in. We were introduced by another filmmaker who brought us together. Florian was in the process of doing this album, and it was extremely hard to find a company [to release it]. Not even my own company, when it was finished, wanted to go for it. We had to go through some strange changes! We took it to EMI in Cologne...we went to another company in Hamburg, where the artists weren't allowed to come in the office! 'You guys have to stay outside, I just want to talk to your manager'.

The digital age

FF I know what is possible to do, but I don't go...it's not my thing. But I know what I can do. It's [just] a different way to record. People think the computer makes the music now. [So] you can compose in the studio. Before you come to the studio you have to know what you want. It's very tricky to work with. I don't like it very much.

In the beginning I was [perceived as] an old genius! - because it was not necessary [that] I know all about this [digital] material. People are very nice to me...[they say] 'this man has had many music by himself recorded'. And so I have my reputation in a new digital studio, because for me it's like paranoia, all this. But they were very nice and now after five or six years I have a little bit of knowledge about this.

I work for a new style for the young generation, with soul. And so I can't do [records] like *Hosianna Mantra* [now] because this young generation, [you] play a little bit [to them]...my daughter is 16, she says 'Oh Papa, beautiful, but

never I will hear this!" And so because I'm a father and I like my children I take them very seriously. And so I listen to what they like. Some [of their music] I like very much! Techno. But [the surroundings] I don't like - the ecstasy, the lights, the volume...

My son, he brings me London Ambient music. Very creative, very beautiful. Relaxed music, but without a nucleus. That's what Techno music lacks. And I make the nucleus. And other things I will do. I need it for my music and for my identity. And I think we go [further] to [making] a modern music than Techno.

[A tape of recent Popol Vuh material has been playing]

GA What do you call this kind of music?

FF It's not Ambient. It comes from the idea of the Ambient, but it's all music. Only, these people don't know anything about modern music....it's all (imitates sound of a bass drum) oomph, oomph, oomph..

EP Like all your music, this has a spirituality to it, in the mix.

FF Perhaps I'm successful to have [made music] in all my life, perhaps unsuccessful...it's not important...I would try to find a music to bring soul to the people. That's all.

EP I think this is very beautiful music.

FF I don't know...

GA Because 'genuine' Popol Vuh fans, their reaction is very different from what you're saying now, because they are always in anticipation of something sacred that he may offer them.

EP But that's living in the past, really.

FF That's how I feel too, that's why I'm doing this contemporary feeling. I can tell you, last Sunday, in the evening before my son had his 21st birthday, out in the country in the house I was cooking a lot and then he comes with - I don't remember the name - [a record] from an Irish singer...a girl. It wasn't Enya! It was all [virgin?], beautiful music. So I'm happy when I can see, it's [at] this time possible to make music not in this [style] (oomp, oomp, oomp). Techno or American Pop...all music and beautiful music, they have a trance and then I'm happy, that's all.

EP That's interesting how you can make a machine human in a way, making what is mechanical relate to somebody who is human - that is an art. Techno doesn't have it.

FF [If you can do that] then you are a good producer.

GA Some people think someone else discovered him, in actual fact I started working with him from the very first note he put on record. It's nice if you can keep that in mind somewhere. I read certain books, encyclopaedias, what do these people really know? I can't make my life any better than I have done. Credit should go where it's due.

EP You have a very clear idea of what you want to do musically now?

FF Because I know I'm no longer a young man, perhaps I don't have, I don't know, many years [left]...and so I know about what I have to do. Like *City Raga*. I know I have some discussions [earlier] about new style and old style, but it's [futile?]. In imagination, you can have...when I [was] 25 years, make the same music like *Hosianna Mantra*, I'm crazy...I'm [happy] in life when I can change, transform, evolve...I need [rites] for transformation, perhaps it's my [force]. This [false] period of creation could be the application of human rights in music. The nucleus is the thing. It's not to say I'm better than when a young man but I know more now than I did then. I no longer compose on the piano. I compose here! (tapping his head). For a long time.

EP Really? Wow. That's impressive. You can do it straight in your head. I watched a programme about Ennio Morricone yesterday - he did the same thing.

FF It's necessary to be able to compose without. The instrument, when you can play an instrument...the fingers are sometimes quicker than your composer mind....

Working with musicians

FF...Like from this harmony - connections, and I know that's not the right word...and then I thought, I don't like these mixed American harmonies. You have a clear chord and you do the second thing and then you have the mixed American chord. And for me...it's a decision of my conscience what kind of harmonies [to use]...but we don't have fights [about it]!

GA Interesting that on this current production that he had, one song was already completed, and after listening to it again and again, he thought it was like...he erased the whole thing because it was too corny! You know...it was against his belief.

FF But we know this, it's not a problem. [working with people?] It's a beautiful thing. Sometimes before I have had some problems with this group, it's normal, but now is...the best days of the week [?].

GA Collaboration has been very continuous...in terms of [for example] Frank Fiedler who's been there from the beginning...and [Guideaux?] for the last six or seven years.

FF That's a very great musician.

GA He only exchanged the singer for example - Maja - on *City Raga*, she lives in Yucatan.

FF They are all people that come to my life. I'm not looking for these kind of people...they just drop into my life. Sometimes, [like with] Maja, I had not seen her for ten years, until all of a sudden she was there. Because I was working with Renate [Knaup], and then she was...why, why are you working with Renate?

EP So in a way, without you trying, you were attracting these people in a very natural way.

GA That is the truth. Certain people come, whether it's Renate, Danny or myself: Florian is the nucleus, people are like satellites around him all of a sudden. They seem to collide, and that is what brings the explosion of creation. But they disappear again!

FF I love her [Renate] very much, in a very deep [way]. I can't say about...I don't do this...but just what I have done...all melodies, five tones higher! - for Renate, and so no longer possible [for her] to scream, singing so high. So she comes back to her home roots. She comes from high in the mountains, she's a very down to earth girl. She can sing beautiful like Heidi...Renate is my Heidi!

GA Heidi is the incarnation of German corniness!

Influences

EP When Popol Vuh started, were you interested in rock or did you find rock music boring?

FF There was a little infection, some by The Beatles, some by The Stones, yes...like a flu! And later, Blind Faith! Indeed really no because when you really, from your young life, start to love music then you're looking for... and it's not important what I say about rock or pop music, I have to look for my way in music to be...and bring out...perhaps, my strange life, it's more with society. Because I have family and other commitments. [My circumstances are] not so nice, like a real rock musician, he lives [financially] from the mother and from the Social Aid, and from the dealing that's part of rock music. And I have family and I like to go the way of this music to my own end - true to myself.

And I thought in this generation with rock music and nobody has knowledge about one eighth of these people. It was new. Sometimes I think - oh... and some people come from the political era in Germany, [particular] to the 1970s. They have had absolutely [radical] ideas. They thought they invented the hole in the record! And in the end...me and a friend [a revolutionary political activist] was standing before his store...he makes his first meditation in a little room. We are singing...and it was good.

EP So right from those early days, you were a contemporary composer as opposed to a pop musician? You probably owed more to a modern avant-garde composer like Stockhausen, rather than The Beatles.

FF Sometimes I think about this. There's only one person in Germany I like (except for Gerhard!), to sit together with him. It's Boris Becker! He's a good man. My son knows him. And he's sung for the disco. And the woman (his wife) Babs was inside...beautiful girl...a half-black woman. It's great [that he married her]: in Germany that takes a lot of courage, it's a political thing.

GA But when you are Boris Becker, who is such a national idol, he's allowed everything! People will accept anything he does, because they love him so much. Boris is really the nation's favourite in many ways. The press may put him down if he loses a couple of times in a row, but as a national [figure] he's a most loved hero.

FF I love him. Like Werner Herzog! Werner has had some success and recognition internationally. But he still drinks his beer from the bottle (in other words he hasn't changed). Only the work is the most important thing, and so we are friends!

EMANEM

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DEREK BAILEY 4001: "Domestic & Public Pieces" (1975-7) *reissue* 4013: "Lace" (1989) *both solo guitar*
ANTHONY BRAXTON & DEREK BAILEY 4006: "First Duo Concert" (1974) *reissue*

JOHN CARTER & BOBBY BRADFORD

4011: "Tandem 1" (1982) 4012: "Tandem 2" (1979 & 1982) *clarinet & cornet*

NIGEL COOMBES & STEVE BERESFORD 4017: "Two to Tangle" (1997) *violin & piano*

STEVE LACY 4004: "Weal & Woe" (1972-3) *reissue - solo & quintet*

EVAN PARKER & PAUL LYTTON

4002: "Three Other Stories" (1971-4) 4009: "Two Octobers" (1972-5)

JOHN RUSSELL & ROGER TURNER 4010: "Birthdays" (1996) *guitar & percussion*

PAUL RUTHERFORD & PAUL ROGERS 4007: "Rogues" (1988) *trumpet & double bass*

ROGER SMITH 4014: "Unexpected Turns" (1993-6) *solo guitar*

SPONTANEOUS MUSIC ENSEMBLE

4005: "Summer 1967" JOHN STEVENS & EVAN PARKER + PETER KOWALD.

4003: "Face to Face" (1973) *reissue plus* JOHN STEVENS & TREVOR WATTS

4015: "Quintessence 1" (1973-4) *reissue plus* 4016: "Quintessence 2" (1973-4) *reissue plus*
JOHN STEVENS, DEREK BAILEY, KENT CARTER, EVAN PARKER & TREVOR WATTS.

4008: "Hot & Cold Heroes" (1980 & 1991) JOHN STEVENS, NIGEL COOMBES & ROGER SMITH

EMANEM 3 BITTACY RISE LONDON NW7 2HH ENGLAND

Distributed in Britain by HARMONIA MUNDI

Emtidi, *Saat, Germany* **Galaxis CD 9019 (1986)**

Pastoral imagery runs like a green silken thread throughout this fine record, starting with the front cover which is a psychedelic airbrush painting of a pink stardust ear of wheat, and the inner gatefold which depicts a luxurious golden field of corn rendered a la Hundertwasser. Emtidi propose on the first track 'Let's Take a Walk in the Park'. This simple harmless activity is spoiled however by the sudden intervention of restrictive authority, in the form of the Park Bye-Laws: 'There's a sign here..saying Keep off, they sing, switching to an assertive major key as their day of fun is spoiled; the phrase finishes with the charming exhortation 'Don't Sit on the Grass, it's too cold for your ass'. I'm tickled pink by the thought of a park sign like this, which somehow confounds the voice of the stern parkkeeper with the argot of a stoned hippy. The remaining LP, though mostly instrumental, scatters further lyrical clues ('Touch the Sun', 'Love Time Rain') as to how better to manage the countryside and enjoy nature, rather than by ruthless enclosure of fields and repressive rules.

Emtidi were a folky duo of Maik Hirschfeldt and Dolly Holmes who managed to sing like a subversive version of Peter Paul and Mary with their close harmonies. Between them they turn in some organ and electronics riffs of charming simplicity and striking melodic richness. Most of their tunes are in a soothing modal key, and only occasionally are there excursions into trippy cosmic improvs, which may come as some consolation to listeners who fear that Krautrock is a home for the overblown and self-indulgent school. Dieter Dirks added percussion and mellotron, and the legendary Cosmic Courier Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser produced.

Spacebox, *GEMA SP1,* **1981**

This is Uli Trepte, the bass player of Guru Guru that was. Spacebox shows us what he got up to in 1979, and I suggest faint hearted listeners should steer well clear. Side 1 blurts out a set of clunky songs driven along by Uli's bass, and enhanced with saxophone and primitive electric treatments. Side

2 is a feast of noisy relentless gibberish; as shrill and painful as having your torso fed through the mincing machine, and it receives full support from our Depression Therapy department who recommend playing it when a good cleaning out of your psycho-cobweb zone is needed. Listeners who have sampled *UFO* by Guru Guru should be gratified to hear the first track, a tribute to the legendary Zonk Machine. I wonder if this device has now transmogrified into the Spacebox, a device which gives the band its name; perhaps this is the Zonk Machine Mach II, now souped up with additional digital technology by now to enable the delivery of even cleaner and mightier Zonks. I have managed to snarf a vinyl copy of Spacebox but something (an expensive retrospective collection, I think) has recently surfaced in the CD mode. Original packaging (ie insertion in a plain corrugated card box) has been to some extent reproduced in the new package.

Kluster, *Zwei-Osterei,* **Los Angeles, Hypnotic,** **CLP 9737-2 (1996)**

Klopzeichen, Hypnotic **CLP 9724-2 (1996)**

A brace of very desirable objects from 1970-71 reissued with care and attention by the Hypnotic label in California. A real history lesson: the original Kluster predates Cluster slightly. Moebius and Roedelius + Conrad Schnitzler = Kluster with a K! Moebius and Rodelius by themselves = Cluster with a C! (That's the better known of the two, who worked with Brian Eno). Both combinations are and were excellent. Schnitzler was influenced by the great Joseph Beuys (he trained as a fine art sculptor) and seems to come at the project from a gallery/conceptual viewpoint. I think he has made records for installation environments. The Kluster project has its roots in the Zodiak Free Arts Lab in Berlin, where Conrad held sway in 1968. A commitment to experimental free-form work across 'various disciplines' is indeed easily detectable in these records, if you listen hard you can discern the techniques at work and you can



almost hear parallels with collage, concept art, or film-making. Both records, made in late 1970 with Conny Plank co-producing, feature stark treated electronic sounds, minimal layering and editing, but extremely disjunctive effects. Overall you find a determined refusal of anything conventionally 'musical' - shape, development or dynamics; instead the sounds are explored and employed for their own sake, and allowed plenty of room to grow, to echo, to meander, and to repeat themselves. Yet each looping or repetition is always somehow out of synch, so that each sound-event yields a slightly new configuration, kaleidoscopic, shifting into new patterns like a snowflake melting on a microscope slide.

The religious texts intoned over the music, performed by Christa Runge and Manfred Paethe, also play a significant part. The piece(s) were commissioned by an organist in the German Church for a specific project, so who knows what evangelistic exhortations or prescriptive dogma these texts comprise! Technically this aspect renders the project slightly compromised in the eyes of some (it was the only way they could get the money to make the record at all), yet to my mind it enhances the entire listening experience. Paethe's foreboding tones in particular add to the general unease and terror that these austere records generate. *Zwei-Ostereis* first part at 4.45 yields up a personal favourite moment, and one of the most unearthly sounds ever put to tape - a wounded moose blurt factory hooter trumpet of the Apocalypse blast!

Another history aspect - both of these records have been sought after for many years by those of an Industrial persuasion, as they are supposed precursors and big influences on that scene. This surely makes these reissues all the more welcome. Each one is remastered very well from a vinyl disc (original tapes missing) and each contains a bonus cut of Cluster with a C playing live in 1980.



Ash Ra Tempel, *The Private Tapes Vol 2*, Germany, Manikin Records MRCD 7012 / GEMA LC 5804 (1996)

Mostly a Manuel Gottsching project on a grand scale (6 volumes exist!), this one yields up an excellent live cut from Ash Ra Tempel in 1971, whose only shortcoming is not being very well recorded. Also three solo pieces by Manuel from 1976-ish, performed with sequencer, synthesizers, and a lovely buzzy drum-machine that pulses and vibrates rather than pops and snaps like today's strident digital devils. This is Techno before the fact, even beating Cabaret Voltaire to a species of clunky rhythm machine-driven noodling; simple two-chord (or even one-chord) synth figures, over which he layers his Gibson guitar solos with lots of Steve Hillage-y echo. Why he's practically Krautrock's answer to Bill Nelson! You may want to snap up the crucial Ash Ra Tempel recordings first before you allow these sprawling indulgences into your racks - they're more like useful footnotes to the great project, but it's good to know the 'bedroom' mode of record making has produced work of this quality.

Embryo, *Embryo's Rache*, SCHNEEBALL 30561

An irresistible platter of warped jazz-rock - the delicious combination of flute, Hammond organs and Fender Rhodes electric piano tastes great to this palate. Forget fusion smoothies of the Weather Report or Spyro Gyra schools, this stuff has real guts and rough edges; it's played with such urgency and heaviness that suggests the Krauts could never get as silky as Herbie Hancock, try as they may. Lalo Schiffrin would kill for a flute sound as sandpapery as Hansi Fischer's. File it next to *Lady Pig* for another example of greasy German jazz-rock; the latter had more horn charts and, erm, unreconstructed 1970s macho lyrics, but were no less wayward than Embryo. This is a different path to the lightness, whimsy and charm of eg The Soft Machine, and once they get into a groove they work it down into the concrete - like The Mothers of Invention on 'King Kong', although they're neither as technically proficient nor as crazy!

'Spain Yes Franco Finished' kicks off with a triumphant mellotron flourish, side by side with a sax and heavy drums in full processional mode (a real

prog-jazz mixture), before the band sweep into a funky flute-electric piano duel in a minor key, suggesting an apt Flamenco flavour akin to Miles Davis' 'Spanish Key'. An overtly political lyric chants 'Revolution is the only way' and - after a mid-section of solos where the track almost disintegrates - the positively barnstorming final riff suggests their revolution was a success. 'Change', which ends the LP, is more traditionally kosmische with its prelude of mellotron clouds and volume-pedalled piano clusters, and quickly warms up into a Red-Spot-of-Jupiter riff that Edgar Froese would adore, set to a syncopated beat. The record ends on a high spot, while the violin is going ballistic right in the middle of a mega-stomping whirlwind workout. These tracks sandwich 'Try to Be' on side two, the LP's only quiet reflective moment - bongoes and keyboard working against a drippy Moon-And-Earth children lyric, which suddenly sparkles at the very ending with a two-second electronic zoom glissando as you 'Fly up into space'. Side one features such delights as a high-register organ solo played by Tabarin Man on 'Tuasendfussler', verging on that Rolf Harris stylophone sound so many studio engineers strive for, against scads of syrupy wah-wah rhythm guitar. 'Time' is effectively Dave Brubeck's 'Take 5' figure taken at a harder and faster lick, and showcases Edgar Hoffman's violin in the mix. On 'Revenge', Hoffman contributes some precious seconds of soprano sax freak-out work, before the track melts down in a confusing welter of percussion and jaw harp. Moments of wonderful disorientation like this are to be cherished in music, I feel; the sleeve art for this record promises the same sort of weirdness, which Embryo can't always match, but they make a great effort. It's a photograph of a semi-naked hippy in silhouette, greeting the sunrise over a plains landscape in primary yellow, grasping in one hand a violin and in the other a Punchinello doll. Or is it a giant cockroach? This fine item was recorded in Köln, no date of issue given; the copy I own is a vinyl reissue/bootleg item, the only format that delivers that total gatefold sleeve art experience my retinas long for (the interior photo of the band confirms all your dreams about what mad Krautrockers should look like!) It has been spotted on CD reissue, as has Embryo's second LP.



**Can, *The Peel Session*,
Strange Fruit SFR CD
135**

Maybe you too dragged your Clark's Wayfinders before purchasing these 1973-75 radio sessions. The fear for me was that The Can's high reputation (Mount Olympus high in my ratings) might somehow be corroded by the late appearance of a bunch of hasty Maida Vale tape-rolls. The unique identity of the finest original discs - *Future Day's* seaspray radiance or *Tago Mago's* be-spooked jamming - evidently benefit from Holger Czukay's magically edited and a production style whereby the four musicians are honed into a coagulating single-cell.

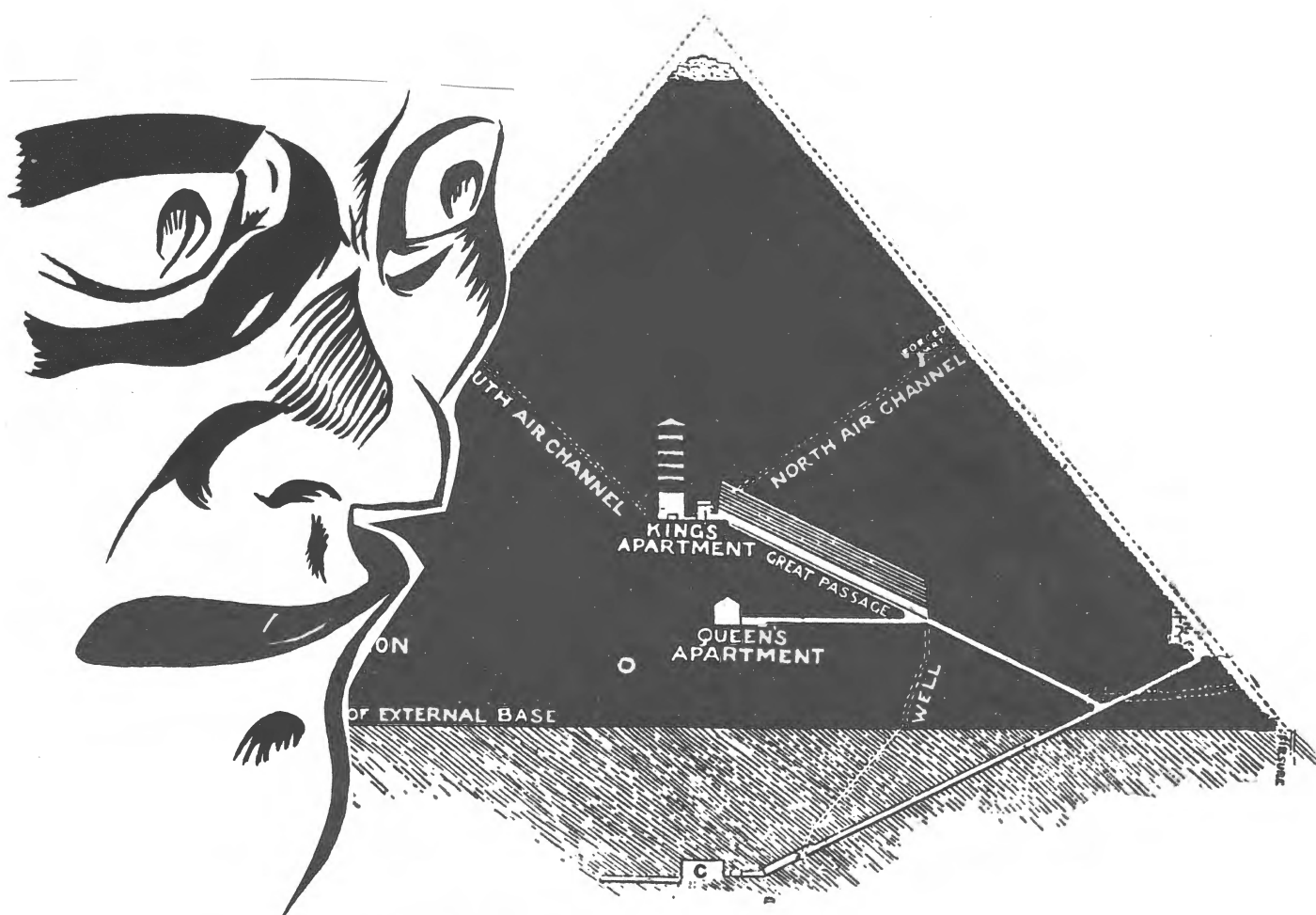
Sure enough, the BBC's utilitarian methods lay the band bare, the playing crisply separated into clean channels. But if this is Can under an unflinching microscope the looking offers some wondrous information. Jaki Liebezit's super-alert drumwork is no surprise

but Michael Karoli is here spotlit as a guitarist who never idles into blues-scale cliché. In fact his quavery fuse-wire sustain steers clear of 'soloing' altogether. Then there's Irmin Schmidt, hunched over a tangled bank of patchboards and plastic keys. His gloomsome synth-murk on 'Return to BB City' hits the frontal lobes like a fleet of ironclad bombers looming between the spires of Cologne Cathedral.

Some of the pieces just fail to reach the alchemical boiling-point swooning Can fans cherish ('Tony Wanna Go') and the later Krautpop-phase cuts are played frustratingly straight. But I'm glad I didn't miss 'Up the Bakerloo Line with Anne'. It's as bony and funksome as anything off *Ege Bamyasi*. Damo performs vocal struts like an amnesiac Mick Jagger who has gleefully forgotten how to speak any identifiable earth-language. No handicap, because the singer is plugged directly into the mysteries of unfettered rhythmic caterwauling. You can't fail to be dazzled. (John Bagnall)

**Between, *Dharana*,
Germany WERGO SM
1011 (1977)**

A spiritual work, rich with devotional resonances, chants, Indian religion - it practically exudes compassion and inner harmony. Warm tone colours and textures and the best of Popol Vuh or Terry Riley. Robert Eliscu is the oboist here, having played with the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra he was also a fixture on many of Popol Vuh's greatest records. The organist Peter Michael Hamel came from Munich which is the other krautrockish connection here. The band also features two Afro-Americans from NYC (one was in the original cast of *Hair!*) on the congas, and an Argentinean guitarist. This LP gives us the side-long 'Dharana' piece, privileging the combo over the orchestra, the latter mixed down to produce a lovely disembodied, tone wash sound. Prepare for a moment of celestial ecstasy when you reach the end of this track - water sounds effects, an electric drone, a basso voice moaning and some gentle orchestral harmonics drifting in the breeze. Recently reissued on CD.



The Horrid Mysteries

Three records from the Pyramid Label

Some rare examples of fascinating electronic music reclaimed from a very obscure time and place. Their release at this time chimes in with the current high level of interest in German 1970s Kosmische music. It isn't immediately obvious how to connect these oddities to a defined sense of a 'Krautrock continuum', which is good as this confounds lazy journalists who think they've got this scene all figured out. Some Doubting Dans have even suggested in print that these records must be 1990s hoaxes, which is absurd. Others have placed too much emphasis on their obscureness, playing up the angle of 'not even the heavy-duty Krautrock collectors have heard of this label', which is an indication of how the specialists want to appropriate everything for themselves. However, such specialisation and selfishness is overturned by democratising releases like this which put the music back in the public domain, where everyone with a CD player who's so inclined can share in these delights.

The facts are simple, the records were made in Cologne by Tony Robinson using Dieter Dirks' studio. Some say the 1972-73 date is wrong and a couple of years later would be

more accurate. (I heard a rumour that the actual names of the bands were added on later, implying the records could have been made by studio session players - but don't quote me on that one!) The music is excellent. The context in which these records were made suggests there was little concern for commercial potential, or even for audience appeal - it was just artists making the music they wanted to make. If this be the case I'm delighted if there is now a slightly larger audience for this material - or at least a more attentive one! Perhaps at last the world is ready for these sounds. To 1996 ears they sound excellent and not even especially challenging, although heaven knows what a 1972 listener would have made of them. Below, John Bagnall reviews *Unknown Deutschland*, EP the Psi-Fi threesome.

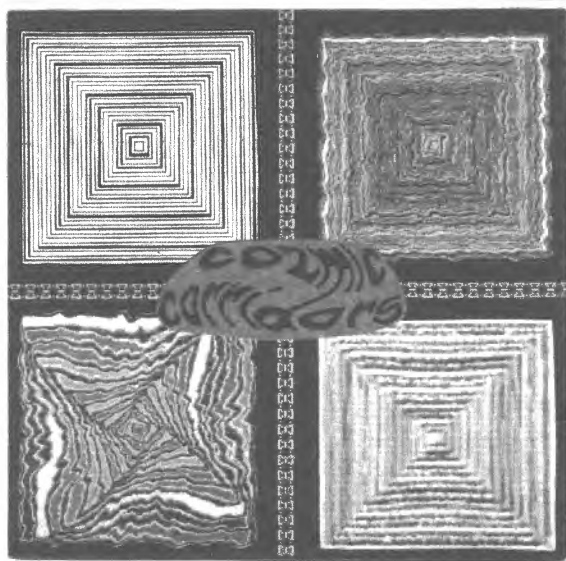
Unknown Deutschland: The Krautrock Archive Volume One, Virgin CD OVD 468

Now the dust has settled on last year's pop-press paranoia (ie 'Is this compilation a fake?') let's just cock a snook and gauge the varying merits of these lost probers of kosmische slop. Most primary age mopes know your current NME staffer only considers a disc 'real' if accompanied by a ribbon-wrapped crate of bilberry Hooch from Suede anyhow, so why get anxious?

Culled from Tony Robinson's mid-70s art-gallery distributed Pyramid label, these six groups are a sandalwood-scented reminder of just how hippyesque much Krautrock was. The motorik pulse of Neu! and Kraftwerk

or the abrasive anti-logic of Faust account for only a ripple in a glistening lake of mystic doodling, some great, some not. And this comp truly is like a time-travelling wander through some Rhineland art-commune, so thick is the whiff of loon pants drying on decaying radiators. Some corners you won't wish to hang out in twice (The Astral Army's cod-metal 'Interstellar Shortwave') but I guarantee you'll soon be feeling right at home. Take Galactic Explorers' unforced globular lobe-tickling which uncoils at a snail's pace. Their analogue simplicity is as enriching as two full days of sleep. Temple sternly lead you into a glow-worm infested Bavarian forest. Here a Kohl-smeared émigré from Notting Hill recites her psych-poetry from a pulsating puffball. And there's more wonderment: over thirteen minutes Ferrote silk-spin long strips of metallic webbing which hang vibrating in the feedback soaked air.

The Psi-Fi label have released three facsimiles on CD of these nearly forgotten neuron-shatterer's LPs (with vintage sleeve art even Daavid Allen would balk at). While I appreciate discerning types will prefer to bask in completeness, the tidbits gathered on *Unknown Deutschland* offer the alternate thrill of finding a box of bright baubles in the back of a dim and musty cupboard. Here's hoping there's more to discover. (John Bagnall)



Cozmik Corridors, Psi-Fi PSCD0001

The recitative by Pauline Fund here passes over the head of this non-German speaking listener, but a certain iambic pentameter can be perceived suggesting some hippy poetry reading. At one level this record is just a celebration of the enjoyable sounds of Hammond organ and Mini-Moog, manipulated here with grace and charm by Alex Meyer, which in itself is surely more than enough justification for constant replaying. At another level, some fine keyboard playing which strikes me as both true to the limitations of the electronic instruments (all very simple textures and patterns) and simultaneously imbued with real human qualities; one track seems to match exactly all the biological and physical properties of the act of breathing. To hear it is like inhaling a sudden blast of cool mountain air.

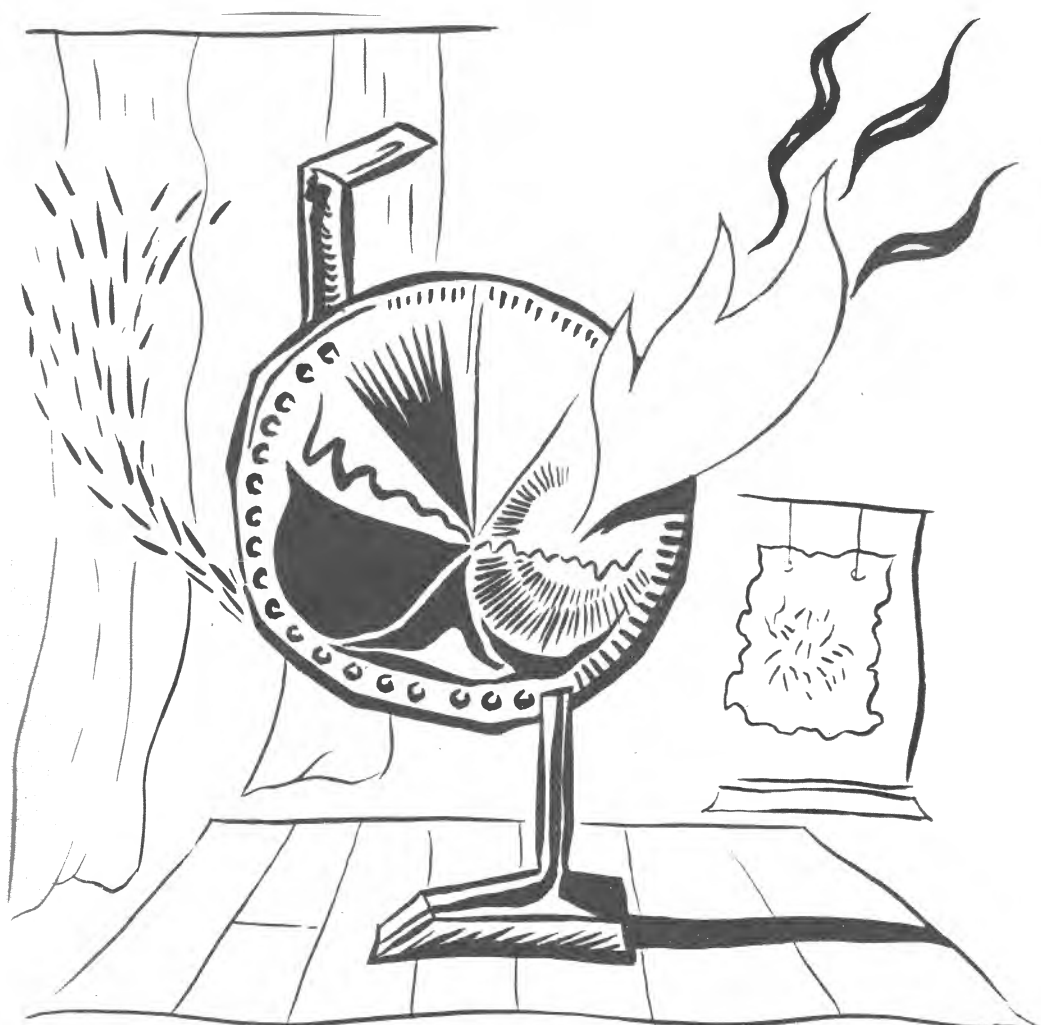


Galactic Explorers, Epitaph for Venus, PSCD0002

A candidate for being dubbed 'Ambient' before Ambient existed. All the signs - song titles and sleeve art especially - can seem so unpromising, as if you're about to get something as lightweight and fluffy as Camel's 'Lunar Sea', but on the contrary this is a work of crystal clear simplicity, 'pure' electronic sounds, and beautiful minimalism. Although not structured minimalism in the way that Terry Riley might wish, rather the players work to their inner vibrations and let these forces guide them where they will. Johannes Lutz, Holst Seisert and Reihard Karwatsky are the trio of unassuming synthesists sailing this boatload of bliss.

Golem, Orion Awakes, PSCD0003

A powerful blast of more conventional cosmic rock, although less beguiling than the two above, it works at loud volume. This features Willi Berghoff on guitar and Manfred Hof on the Hammond and Mellotron, backed up by a wah-wah bass from Mungo that beats John Wetton six ways from Sunday. Only the drummer lets them down - 'Stellar Launch' is prevented from soaring into space by his leaden, unimaginative bass drum. Skip to 'Jupiter and Beyond' for a truly unashamed science-fiction spacerocket romp, built from a sharp organ figure doubled by the guitar line and enhanced by the sparing use of the phaser. Here, and on the title track, the band summon up that sense of monumental scale, as of some lumbering dinosaur, as only unreconstructed hippies can. 'Godhead Dance' is as dismal an attempt at funkiness as you could imagine, with the possible exception of Keith Emerson's Hammond riffs. Sound-wise at least, with the wah-wah rhythm guitar, bongoes and mega-heavy bass as its anchor, this track almost predicts the rise of George Clinton and P-Funk - but Golem lack the soul, finally.



THE GODS OF CHAOS RULED FOR TWO NIGHTS.

Wild and mysterious music plus action painting, a concrete mixer, a threshing machine, an engineer in arc-welding gear throwing out fountains of orange sparks. Faust are clearly able to play some of the most exciting avant-garde rock ever to enter the atmosphere, with an almost embarrassing facility, so why do they find it necessary to give themselves so many handicaps? No sooner was the musical performance beginning to warm up than everyone downed tools, and left the stage to perform sideshow antics; Jean-Herve Peron stripped himself bare to attack a wall full of white master bags with his paint roller (these items were later used to sleeve the 12" record of their John Peel sessions, signed and numbered and sold at the gig for £20 a throw); and later he leaped into the audience to unveil the threshing machine which blew leaves and white muslim sheets all over the crowd, while that Faustian demon stood astride this machinery laughing like a madman. These events shouldn't dominate one's perception of the concert, yet these are the things everyone will remember. I felt they could have given the music more of a chance, as some of the performance struck me as excellent as anything they've committed to record. Supplemented by a very competent organ player and a guitarist who was occasionally permitted to let rip with some first-rate wah-wah induced solos, Jean-Herve and Werner Diermaier left you in no doubt that they are the exhibitionist stars of Faust. The drummer this time cut a particularly impressive figure, three large toms upended before him like hideous steel canisters, a battered sheet of

tin, a steel pipe held high above the head...all these were mercilessly pounded, while his aspect reminded me of nothing so much as the terrifying serial killer in Michael Mann's movie *Manhunter* - during a silent (apparently) segment, where he stood behind his battery of percussion and just glared at you. Other musical highlights included a rip-roaring 'Schempal Buddah' (in response to audience demand), the use of a concrete mixer's engine as percussion track, a shimmering pearl of an acoustic guitar performance, and a bilingual ranting in French and German which generated that sense of panic and hysterical bewilderment that only Faust can deliver. The evening was not a complete loss then, but I wish it had felt less throwaway; they seem a lot more sure of themselves than at the Marquee gig, where Jean-Herve had exhibited a child-like gratitude at being asked to play again, but

there may be a downside to this new confidence. The 1996 model of Faust makes more knowing nods and winks at the audience ('You didn't recognise that song? It's a new one!') and also seems more equipped to make money out of us than before, not that I begrudge these mad geniuses a single penny.

Faust @ The Garage, London, 2 December 1996

Conrad Schnitzler

'I Hate Titles'

Interview by
Norbert Schilling

This piece comprises selected excerpts from a recent interview, hand-picked and translated by Norbert Schilling. Norbert states that Conrad studied sculpture as a pupil of the great conceptual artist Joseph Beuys during the 1960s; also that he never actually studied under Stockhausen, as has been stated elsewhere. Norbert sent me a copy of Eruption (Marginal Talent MT-367), which is a reissue of the last live concert (1971 in Gottingen) of Kluster. This record was originally issued as Schwarz, credited to Schnitzler, Roedelius, Moebius and Freudigmann; pressed in an edition of 200 copies and commissioned by the Block gallery as a sound installation. Eruption should be required listening for anyone seriously interested in the development of electronic music as an art form, and in my view a copy should be issued with every purchase of a synthesizer as a benchmark of quality and as a stern warning to any juvenile dabblers in this area.

I AM A PERFORMER, ACTION-ARTIST, AN INTER-MEDIA ARTIST, not a multi-media artist. I work 'in between' the arts. The characterization of me as a 'musician' - I take this as an abusive word. I see myself as a composer - or some kind of an architect of cut ups / collages.

I'm not interested in having publicity or a public feedback; I just do my work and I can't think about the possibility that someone will be interested, in some ten years or so, in what

I do today. Personally I live here and now, as good as it is possible; the reflection about the fact, that I live now, means that this moment has already passed.

All the cassettes and CDs that I've privately released, I've let them run under the 'Contemporary Music' category. I do something, I go one way and I'm not prepared to go that way ten times in succession. So on principle, I do something I haven't done before, that gives me satisfaction.



On principle, I sell nothing. I allow only a kind of understanding that some [money] can be recovered from it. I always retain for myself the job of editing the material. In the past, I have sold CDs by myself, but I don't do this any more. I've even produced my material on records and sold them, but I've learned that an artist cannot really do everything. For me it's no longer desperately important to

sell anything now. I have enough to eat, a bed where I can sleep, and that's really enough for me at the moment. Why should I want more? Why should I have success or gigantic amounts of money? Where did this idea originate - that you are what you earn? That you have to run after money? After all Pop Music is popular music - music for the people - but when [a pop musician] can earn so much money, one becomes corrupt very quickly. I did not want this. It is not worth striving for.

I've worked for nearly thirty years now, and most people are only interested in my old stuff. I feel this is a degradation of my present state of being - a negation of my work, the work that I do now. It would be better if people became acquainted with my new compositions.

I don't want nostalgia. Life's very short and it comes to an end pretty damn quick. So don't live in the past, don't live in the future - live now!

The records I made in the past came 'out of the cooking pot' straight onto the tape. In the widest sense of the word, this was 'Techno' - just the rhythm machines and a minimal melody. Then you give the recorded tracks ridiculous titles, for example 'Die Rebelen haben sich in den Bergen versteckt' (The rebels have hidden in the mountains) - and that's it.

Krautrock

Kraut is cabbage - it gives you a bellyful of wind! Rock is Rock - it has something to do with guitar, bass and drums. Can, for example, they have something...but I don't know what that thing is. Irmin Schmidt learned to conduct classical music; he was also a pupil of Karlheinz Stockhausen. I've never understood why he did this ridiculous rock music. Sure, Can recorded some things on their records that are rather abstract.

Irmin Schmidt overlaps a little with what I started to do, that I still do - I connect sounds, I compose. 'Don't think about the fact that you're not a musician, or that you're not perfect, don't think about anything - just do it!' he said to me at the time - that was about 1967. That encouraged me, because that's the way I've always worked.

I never liked hippie music! Boring, commonplace stuff! I preferred different things - Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry, Stockhausen, John Cage.

Kluster

My first group, before Kluster, was called Geräusche [= Noises]. If lots of people make noises, it becomes an orchestra. If you do it alone - for example the sound of a stone on linoleum - that's a solo track. If you play these sounds and record them onto different tracks, it becomes a composition.

Kluster - that's me! Make horrible noises with instruments and microphones and echo-machines. Just do it and produce as much noise as you want. If you organize this noise it's not just pure chaos...and it can grow into music.

If you enter a factory floor, close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you, especially where they work with big

parts of iron or steel. I studied engine building and when I went to sea I worked in the engine-room - I've always been involved with the control of sounds. If there's a sound you don't like, you turn it off or you turn it on at another place. Now you have made your first step in the principle of composition.

In the spectrum of the 'white noise' that we made with Kluster, all sounds are included Everything is included. And I've always held in-depth discussions on the subject of white noise with myself.

Titles...I hate titles. I hate programmed music! There are titles that others invented for my music, but these titles have nothing to do with me. An example - the title 'Electric Garden' isn't my idea. There was this delicious record called *An Electric Storm* by the English group White Noise. One of the best ever LPs made with electronic pop music - very stylish - but done excellently. There I found the words 'Electric Garden' that I simply borrowed from there as a title for my track.

There's a plan to reanimate Kluster - with a K, not Cluster, but as Kluster 2000. In truth Kluster has never died. I've never said this group wouldn't be there for all time - because I am the group, I am Kluster. I played gigs for years and years alone, using the name Kluster, and because there are such high waves [of interest] now - some kind of Krautrock-mania - I said for fun 'Well let's go and do some Kluster'.

Tangerine Dream

I don't have anything to do with this [band]. That's Soft-Music, [played] till you have to puke - that's not my kind of material. It's just Pop Music and no art - MOR for everyone. In the final analysis they work with the same feelings as pop singers. Let them have their feelings, but then they shouldn't pretend that it's art. I don't like that. Soft Music appeals to the lowest instincts of the human being.

At all events popularity isn't what I have ever looked for. I did what I had to do, and you could compare that to Joseph Beuys, who unloaded a lump of grease into the corner of the Art Gallery. [Everyone said] '...And this is art?'

It's difficult for the art when it insists on this fact, that even ugliness has its charm.

For a list of available recordings, contact PLATE LUNCH, PO Box

1503, 53585 Bad Honnef, Germany.

See elsewhere for reviews of Kluster's first 2 records.





Musique Concrète and Electro- Acoustic

Their Trinity Acts, A Mineral Fire

Musique Concrète is 20th century alchemy! Truly the music of the environment, it is the ingenious and simple organisation and transmutation of recorded sounds into endlessly fascinating configurations; which is the same as any conventional recording technique except Musique Concrète doesn't use musical instruments as the source. Instead, it utilises sounds from nature. Revelation came to me in the shape of a compilation on vinyl, **Musique Concrète, Vox Candide ST GBY 639 (1969)**. Many of the big names of the Paris-based Electroacoustic 1950-60s school - La Groupe de Recherches Musicales - turned in a contribution, which after only one hearing plugged me into another universe. This old record is simply so organic it virtually smells of newly-turned earth. Such a perception comes with hindsight - nowadays our modern ears are so used to note-perfect, bright, clean, defined, sharp digital sound, that anything as 100% analogue as this music - which is almost entirely to do with the splicing of magnetic tape, played on reel-to-reel tape decks - will announce its difference. Why you can practically make out every grain of oxide leaping off the quarter-inch film and dancing joyously in a microstructural fabric. Even in the harsher moments of crash-collision editing, it creaks with a gentle and certain ageless quality.

Say goodbye to the Grandfather Clock, to your old life of minute-by-minute tramline existence dictated by Father

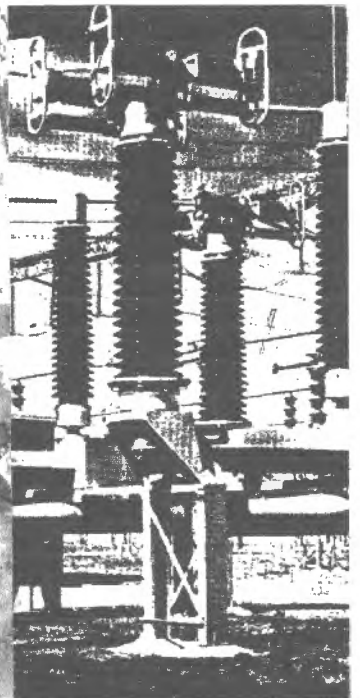
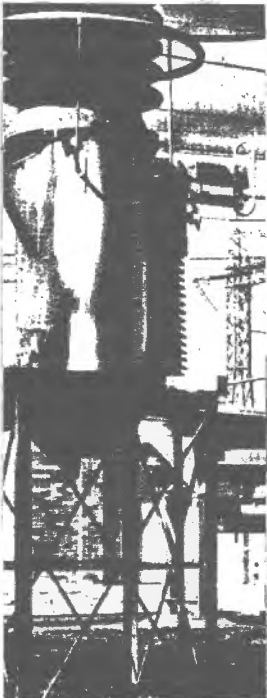
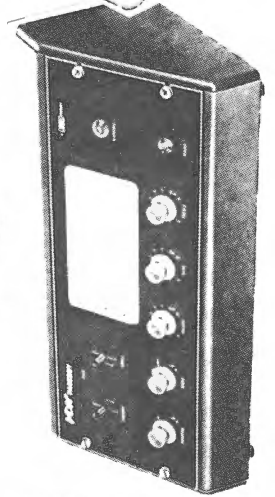
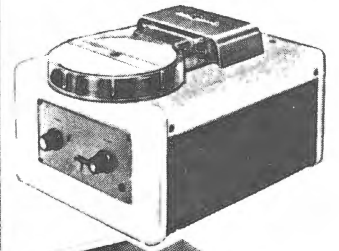
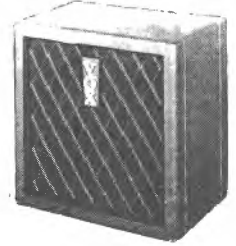
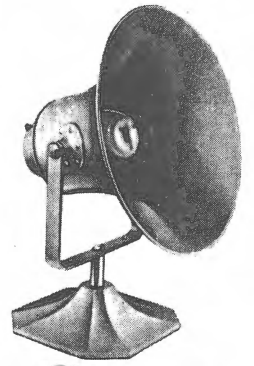
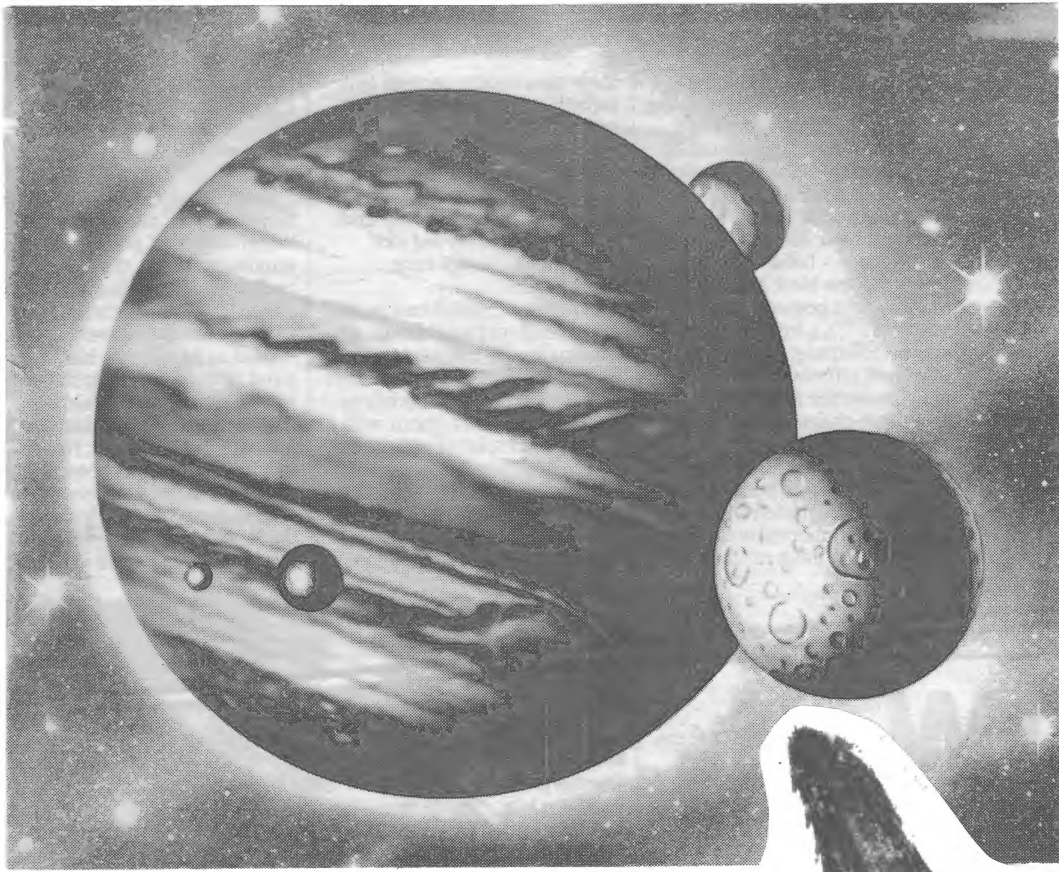
Time. Your perception of the duration of time goes haywire with Musique Concrète. These composers aren't in any hurry to put their point across, the project will unspool before you for as long as needs be. You learn that beginnings and ends really have no place here. A fourth-dimensional world is being opened up for you to explore, one in which you could somehow spend an infinite time. The grooves on the vinyl are just an entry point - your whole cadaver is drawn in, ears first. They got me body and soul, and a bit of me is still wandering and exploring these fascinatingly alien zones.

'Terre de feu' by Francois-Bernard Mâche is a ceremony by the seashore involving pots of fresh water and seashells hung on strings under a bright blue sky. A gong struck underwater. Recordings of fire and water were the source - 'sound materials have a life that obeys the same laws [as these elements]', according to Mâche. But all traces of the original source have been obfuscated. This very processing is what Steve Reich didn't dig about Musique Concrète, and preferred to call a spade a spade - if he composed with tape materials, the sources would not be disguised. It's a commonplace to state that today's world of digital sampling owes much to Reich. I suppose Musique Concrète has a certain old-fashioned quaintness in striving to transmogrify its sources to this extent, yet to me this is the very point of it all. If Mâche here is dealing with the natural laws of physics, these laws are harnessed to transfer to sound, and they show through in the final composition no matter what he does to the tapes; leaving the listener with a fascinating template which one can then stamp into the raw material of own's own creative thots. Moreover if the laws of physics can be thus disrupted and distorted to such extreme lengths, then what price our belief in a universe governed by stable laws?

All this makes some demands on the listener. The chief advantage to surrendering to their demands is that you are freed from many constraints usually associated with playing records. The most familiar trap which you escape is the narrative one - and I know I've bored you with this one before. If a 'classic' pop song tells a story - and they all do really - this music by contrast invites you to create your own stories. In fact it may even go beyond that, inviting you to stretch your imagination and creative powers.

Michel Philipot's contribution is 'Etude III', where for a few seconds he almost anticipates the sound of Keiji Haino's guitar with his high-speed wasp tornado noises. This one's a very bitty composition of jarring sounds - some recognisable as piano chords played backwards (familiar now after David





Bowie, for example) - it verges on the humorous, but proves the composer's point about working with textures. Echoey and spacey sounds rub up against close-miked cut-off sounds, edited into exciting collisions or even occurring in the same overdubbed passage. This rapid succession of sensations means the listener never sleeps, although Philipot's extreme abstraction refuses me that brooding elaboration which allows me to get lost in Mâche's world.

One is also struck by those mineral sample photographs on the cover - a most apt image. This music is decidedly elemental, maybe even primordial. The Vox Candide compilation is, I think, only one of many vinyl compilations that were issued in the 1950s and 1960s; it's hard to find originals of them these days, as the few copies pressed have become desirable for some reason. However, an impressive CD reissue programme is underway, and you can satisfy your thirst for ElectroAcoustic imports by asking for catalogues at These Records or ReR.

Although you can find some vintage compilations, those on INA GRM are more recent recordings by the old masters.



Bernard Parmegiani's *La Création Du Monde*, Paris INA GRM C1002 (1996)

would seem to agree with my feelings about the elemental components. This music is composed of iron and earth, minerals and fire! This recording never fails to cheer me up - it's like taking a holiday in another dimension. I like it there - there's lots of air, light and space, and I can wander off into a new unexplored corner every time. My peregrinations always take me to the joyous segment where a cosmic bathtub is draining, emptying all the primordial soup of existence into space; this segues into a pastoral scene, birds twittering suggesting the final touches of the Creator finishing off his new world.

Francois Bayle's *Erospheres*, INA C 3002 (1990)

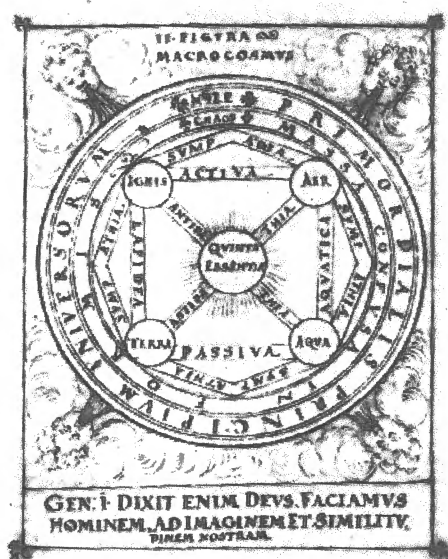
contains two suites: the first 'Tremblement de Terre tres doux' starting with a totally non-musical source, metal boules rolling around in a metal tub, close-miked and treated with phasing and ring modulation. This piece is electrifyingly intense - you can almost taste the air singing with metallic particles, like a mouthful of loose change! The second suite 'Toupie dans le ciel' makes some concessions to rhythm and melody (it might use keyboards) and each segment repeats a soothing figure, exploring its inner space thoroughly.



As for Luc Ferrari's *Presque Rien*, INA C

2008 (1995), this is virtually a series of simple environmental recordings with apparently little or no intervention from the impish Luc himself. It's one of the most beautiful records I've ever heard. Particularly affecting are the sounds of the tractor engine in the countryside, and the natural rhythms and drones of the 'insects mystérieux' apparently recorded at night - there are also fragments of a murmured conversation between a French couple going on. It segues into a terrifying thunderclap sound, which after its first explosion is fed through some electronic filter, each time becoming something quite new and unheard. Nature into Music, via the medium of electronics. So you might well ask why is this different from one of those Relaxation-Therapy New Age environmental recordings of the Amazon rain forest? Perhaps it isn't, but surely there is artistic invention going on in the selection of the recordings and their juxtaposition. The intervention may appear minimal (Almost Nothing, indeed), yet Ferrari manages to invest each episode with atmosphere, tension, and depth; and to some extent, editorialises his materials to suggest meanings. You don't get that from a Relaxation CD, which is just raw material, marketed solely for a consumerist purpose and extrapolates no meaning from the sounds at all.



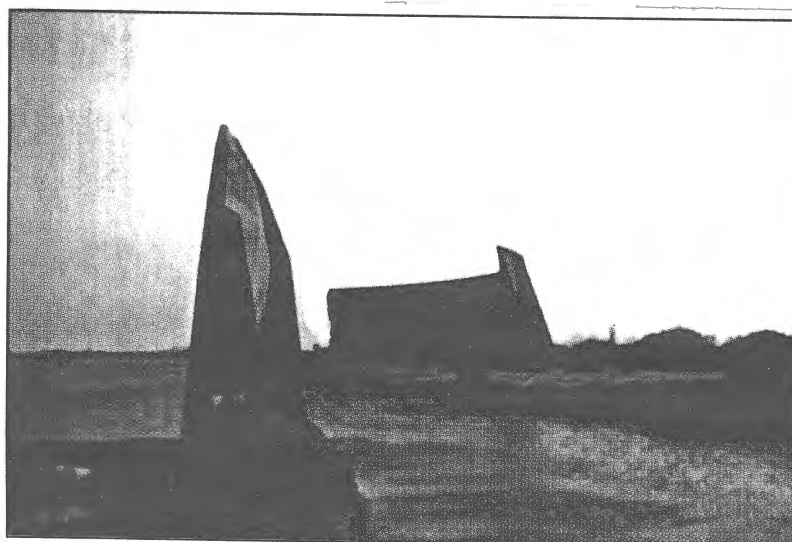


Additional Adepts and Acolytes

Michael Prime is a living UK musician who could be said to have inherited some of the methods and processes of Electroacoustic, and remains true to its principles with no danger of becoming a tape-alone luddite. I mentioned *Aquifers* last issue which contains a deal of environmental recordings, as does his newie **Cellular Radar, Mycophile SPOR 01 (1996)**, even allowing

such pre-programmed events as a girl reading a poem. City Street noises, and atmospheric Weather sounds, are also deployed. 'Finis Terra', with a deft touch of the volume faders, puts the sound of human breathing on an equal footing with that of the wind blowing - an aural disruption of scale is created. Titles 'Climb down the ladder of carbon' and 'Nocturnal resort' add further to my hinted themes of elements and safe havens, although the latter resort is a very spooky place.

Michael Prime is also a member of the 7-piece **Morphogenesis**, a combo of UK players roughly in the area of electro-acoustic, except that everything they do is performed and recorded in real time, with no overdubs.



That's an important distinction; if editing and tape manipulation end up producing a species of cultivated garden, then the Morphogenesis technique is to generate each separate sound world, from a variety of semi-controlled sources, and let everything grow like a wild forest. If this style of husbandry appeals then glom their CDs as soon as you can. Morphogenesis have a library of tapes, and periodically issue highlights from the collection. Two CDs worth bending an ear to are **Solarisation, Germany Streamline 1006 (1994)**; and **Charivari Music, Paradigm PD02 (1996)** issued by Clive Graham, the second issue on his Paradigm label. Of the two I think *Solarisation* is slightly better - it has more tension than *Charivari*, more abrasive surfaces. (I'll never forget playing it to my four year-old niece - 'it sounds like Ice Giants marching!') Morphogenesis never fail in their unique capability, every time slowly building up a world that envelops the listener with individual, elemental characteristics. Michael Prime is usually occupied adding the water component, be it condensation or ice crystals. Another player adds radio dialogue samples in stuttering bursts, the rudimentary speech of this world's strange populace. Elsewhere, building blocks are assembled and strange temples are constructed, towers built of wood swaying in the breeze. At least four of the key players are also visual-arts inclined, judging by the four photographs of equally abstract ambiguous beauty adorning *Solarisation*.

Then of course there's this monstrous gloomy Czech record **Raab, Recommended RR 23**, that has finally worn down my resistance and now inhabits a niche somewhere in my being. **Jaroslav Krcek** recorded

it in Prague in 1970-1971. It uses the techniques of ElectroAcoustic in the service of a dramatic production - a bit like a more articulated version of a Radio 3 play with help from the Radiophonic Workshop. However this 'doesn't just add background sound effects so much as integrate the tape

manipulation into the performance, and the listening experience; so dialogue and exposition itself is regarded as fair game for such treatment. It seems to be a depressing story (the text is by Zdenek Barborka) and probably doesn't lend itself to immediate comprehension by Western European ears - starting from a biblical text, Joshua 6 and the Fall of Jericho, there may be a grim political message behind it all - but I'd recommend it in spite of these obstacles.

This Heat

Made Available, John Peel Sessions, These 10 CD (1996)

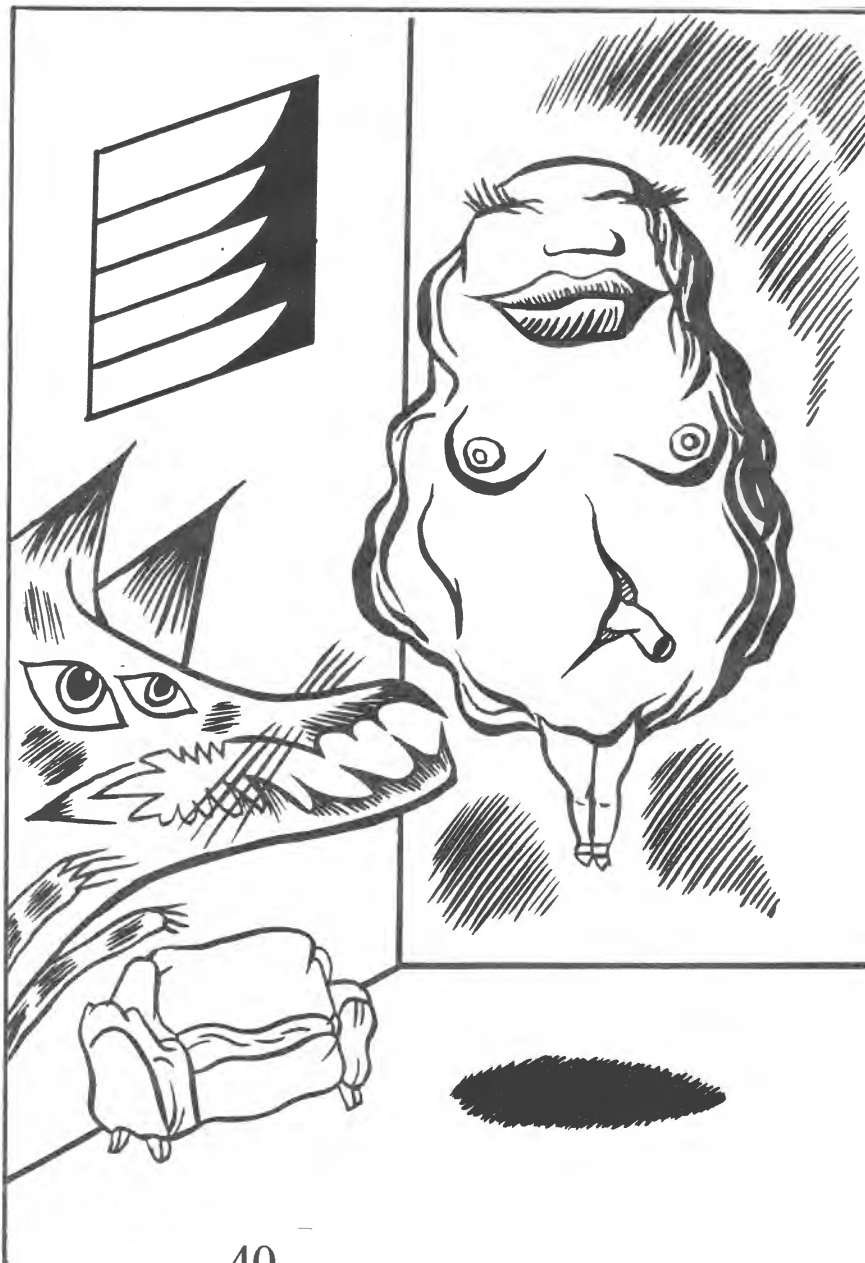
This Heat cast a long shadow and still have the faithful and the followers clamouring for release of rare materials. They recorded two John Peel sessions in 1977 (incidentally, the first session was also broadcast by Alan Freeman!) and as this CD shows their music has a timeless quality that makes it as important as any music being performed today. The opening cut 'Horizontal Hold' is a performance of devastating power, one of their best compositions and belted out here with urgent relish. 'The Fall of Saigon', comprised mainly I think of tape loops - most notably the resonant woodblocks making a rhythm track - the principal performed sections are the vocal and guitar solo. I've always loved the disturbing story of this song which dispassionately depicts cabin fever, madness and cannibalism through its elegant word-play and economic written qualities. Eating furniture and then eating people! Whether there's any connection with the actual political events of Saigon, I know not; but I enjoy the psychological suggestion of the behaviour of human beings in extremis. Performed with a This Heat stylistic signature, a basso profundo voice singing the same line as the lead vocal. An unholy Caliban-esque twin of the storyteller leaning over his shoulder.

'Rimp Ramp Romp' must rate as the 'undiscovered classic', a treat for hungry This Heat fans like myself. An eccentric brute of a piece that justifies this CD's existence at a stroke. A shining example of the unique chemistry they had when they were full-on. Perhaps it's a throwaway improvisation, perhaps semi-arranged, perhaps edited; whichever way it's a flash of inspired music. Dynamic is This Heat's middle name - this piece physically shoves you from one place to another, perhaps two different rooms in the same dusty Svankmajer house; where one room tucks you up in bed with a wild ape, the other has bright sunlight calmly pouring through the windows. I've often felt their quieter, abstract work was investigating the corners of an unfamiliar room; listen to the three other non-vocal pieces here. 'Sitting' has piano and synth burlings joined by an uncertain clarinet, while 'Basement Boy' features a melodeon line (rarely

heard outside of reggae music), both instruments hesitatingly feeling their way around an alien environment.

'Makeshift' (which later became 'Makeshift Swahili') has the harsh Dalek voice barking its ferocious message which is perhaps the only feature to have dated somewhat. But listen to what the instruments are doing here, everything's working overtime, standing out, driving the piece forward, supporting the others. This Heat evolved a semi-utopian working method, where no musician shows off or is allowed to fall asleep for a second, as if part of an idealistic quasi-Marxist commune. This may tie in with the extremely radical political content of their message (evident on the second LP *Deceit*).

Having been on the bootleg circuit for some time, these cuts are at last officially available; it seems the band members themselves remain largely unmotivated to release further items (and I agree that artistically it can be tedious and distasteful to have one's past achievements dredged up over and over - surely the work you're doing now is what counts). However, in Japan there have been rumours of four or five live CD boots...





The Horror and Mundanity of WE BE ECHO

By Cindy War Arrow

Someone once remarked to me that they considered 'Industrial' music to be evil. Not through any religious motivation, but rather from the tendency of artists tarnished with that brush to concentrate on the morbid. I disagreed then as I do now with such a subjective judgement. A soundtrack of relentlessly oppressive noise kept me sane during my teenage years spent in small-town, redneck, chicken-shagging England. 'Industrial'? Who comes up with these spurious categorisations?

For the sake of clarification, 'Industrial' as a generalisation is commonly applied to that part of the experimental 'scene' (man) which sprang fully-formed from the wake of Throbbing Gristle at the end of the 1970s. Cabaret Voltaire and 23 Skidoo are amongst those who achieved wide recognition, but there were loads of the buggers, holed up in broom cupboards across the country, churning out cassettes or records of occasionally dreary but often innovative and exciting music. Dave Henderson, writing for *Sounds* music paper, attempted to cover this phenomenon in his 'Wild Planet' columns, which ultimately served to show that whatever this was, it wasn't a scene. There was no coherent 'Industrial' sound. All that unified the individuals

concerned was their diversity, and only a fool could've attempted to shoehorn them into any teen fad of the day. One common factor however seemed to be a certain sense of nihilism, also present I'd argue in any half-decent *punque roque* ditty of the time, which separated this wave from its immediate musical - if not conceptual - forefathers: Faust, Can, Neu!, and those other crazy hairy dudes. And by the way, is it just me or are Stereolab, much as I love them, really just the Showaddywaddy of the 90s? 'Yes', I hear you cry in unison, 'but who de fuck are We Be Echo? I'll get to the point.

Kevin Thorne (KT) and Raymond Georgeson (RG) are names known to any industrial trainspotter worth his (or her, but probably his) salt, conversant with catalogue numbers and playing times of obscure import singles by 'Swedish Nature' (for pedantic example). KT and RG are mentioned on the cover of Throbbing Gristle's *Heathen Earth* album (which is like, a classic, dude) as members of the specially invited audience present at the recording. Duly inspired, the duo paired up to record and perform as **Third Door From The Left** (TDFTL), staying together for a little over a year, after which Kevin went solo as **We Be Echo**. The differences between these two groups are negligible, so I'll discuss them simply as components of a single body of work. The combined influences of Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire, and to an extent Joy Division are apparent to greater or lesser degrees throughout Kevin Thorne's criminally obscure musical career, which apparently was used as a negative criticism in fanzines of the day. What such reviewers overlook is that a lot else was going on in there as well.

The sleeve notes penned by Iham (of *Nanavesh* mag, fact fans) for the special edition *Cesa Evi* cassette mention Kevin's frustration at his own limitations, and this is understandable given the modest recording set-up at his disposal. Youngsters today (who, by the way, don't know they're born) may moan about the poor bass response of their 8-tracks or their sampler's inability to store more than half an hour of sound. Fucking pouffs! We Be Echo recorded most of their output on a *Sharp Music Centre*! As part of his diminutive sonic arsenal, Kevin held a few cheap synths and cranky old drum machines of the kind which certain people will now pay thousands of pounds for, having spent ten years taking the piss out of you for hanging onto 'that antique'. Add a few bog-standard effects pedals and a rickety guitar and one might, with good reason, suspect this to be a recipe for prolonged and uninteresting listening. Not at all. In spite of such an impoverished range of tools and by the intervention of a remarkable instinct for inventiveness, We Be Echo produced a small but daunting catalogue of work of consistently high quality. Tracks such as 'Under Attack' and 'Witches Burn' still scare the living shit out of me ten years on, in a way that Ministry (to name one of many groups of contemporary comedians dubbed 'Industrial' by clueless whippersnappers) never could.

Kevin's work fell into three distinct phases, the first of which is represented by the two cassettes issued by Third Door From The Left. The music here is largely driven by drum machine, with guitar, bass, synthesizer and tapes of found noise or speech contributing to a quite overwhelming

sound, undiminished in its disturbing impact by its extremely poor quality (sounding like it was mastered on one of those cassettes available in packs of 20 for a quid at car boot sales). The mumbled monotone delivered by Raymond Georgeson in lieu of actual vocals should have elevated TDFTL to legendary status. There was nothing half-assed about this group. Even the lyrics (in particular 'Tear Out My Heart' and 'It's Not Us') work as poetry in their own right, unlike that tedious toss churned out by yer average rock star. John Lennon is but one of many names that spring to mind here. Songs, fine. Poetry, my fucking ringpiece! Oh, while I'm on the subject...can we all please stop banging on about The Beatles now? It's getting boring. TDFTL succeeded in producing truly dark Gothic music, with great innovation and none of the laughable pantomime which one justifiably associates with that term.

Phase Two: working solo as We Be Echo, Kevin began to reach a larger audience, relatively speaking (I'm unaware of any appearance he may have made in the top ten). His cassettes sold probably a few hundred, rather than in tens; he made it onto vinyl; received fleeting recognition in national music papers; and was played on college radio stations as far afield as America and New Zealand. His distinctive graphic design work graced a number of record sleeves, notably one by Chris and Cosey; at one point he was chalked in to play bass with them, though sadly this never came about. We Be Echo, as represented on the bed-wettingly fine *Cesa Evi* cassette, were a musical refinement of the organised chaos of TDFTL. The rhythm programming shows an increased complexity, lending tension to the bass and keyboard components. In place of vocals there are deftly-manipulated speech recordings, providing a thematically provocative narrative to the tracks. Speech and sounds are juxtaposed, edited and repeated, in or out of context, to great effect. Many others have tried similar things (often with access to superior equipment) but few succeed so well as We Be Echo. Perhaps being forced to work that little bit harder, given the austerity of Kevin's 'studio', produced something far greater than the sum of its parts. Much of Kevin's work from this period, owing largely to a refined use of speech tapes, has a documentary nature; as though the music itself is providing evidence of some event, without comment, or even human intervention. Tracks such as 'Survivalist', 'Sex Slaves', and 'I'm a Gambler' (not, I must stress, to be confused with Madonna's hit single) are good examples of this. The music races on, heavy with implied emotional undercurrents, whilst the vocal track meanders casually onwards, curiously blending the horror and mundanity of the narrative into an ultimately dispassionate dialogue.

The final phase of Kevin's musical output began in 1984, when his wife Bobbie came in as vocalist. Happily the Linda McCartney effect is not too much in evidence here (though I do have problems with the theory that Linda had a

detrimental effect upon Paul's songwriting, which was quite frankly shite at the best of times, with or without the influence of her indoors). With the emphasis now on Bobbie's vocals, the music was stripped down to little more than basic rhythm and sequencer patterns, with a few atmospheric effects thrown in for good measure. Personally I find this period the least interesting of Kevin's career. The music, even taking into account its increased minimalism, somehow seems less finished, less carefully considered than before. Bobbie's voice is not always up to the requirements of the tracks. Having said that, this line up thankfully avoided pursuing the obvious course of becoming a verse-chorus orientated pop synth type thang and some of the work, 'Housewife's Choice' or the especially beautiful 'Witches Burn' for example, still stand up as masterpieces to this day.



Despite a slow but steady increase of interest in We Be Echo, Kevin threw in the musical towel in late 1986. Was he disillusioned with his own limitations, the lack of support for the musically esoteric, or maybe even surfeited with marital bliss, who knows? I was personally saddened, having become irritated by the vast wealth of piss-poor derivative crap flooding the experimental cassette scene. We Be Echo were one of the few name bands who could be relied on to provide consistently worthwhile listening. Before concluding I wish to stress that I anticipate criticism for this article along the usual lines, ie some tosser banging on about a band no-one's ever heard of and probably didn't even exist, in a vain attempt to demonstrate superiority through obscurity. Please don't bother. I'm long past the stage of apologising for my listening

proclivities, whether esoteric (Morris Dolby and the Bouncy Lobster Band, anyone?) or otherwise (Iron Maiden - cos they ROCK, dude!) and by the fiery staff of Huitzilopochtli I declare We Be Echo were an important band. It grieves me that a combo of such high calibre floundered and petered out without so much as a whimper, considering the unconditional praise squirted towards any old wanker with a sampler and a Tortoise T-shirt by *Melody Maker* - toilet paper with delusions of grandeur that has on more than one occasion proclaimed itself to be our chief proponent of the avant-garde ... er ... run that one by me again?

I'm not going to proclaim We Be Echo as the saviours of the human race, but if you have an inquiring mind and a discriminating ear they are worthy of your attention. In particular the quality and sophistication of this music, recorded as I have said on a Sharp Music centre with very little equipment, is a fine illustration of what effort and invention can produce. The number of bands today with a vast NASA-style studio set up is alarming, and in spite of all this wonderful technology there's so little new music one could truly call inspired. To be frank most of it's a load of poop, produced by people not worthy of stirring Kevin Thorne's tea.



**Let's look up
and Smile . . .**

(A) Sudden Sway

**Sir Savoir,
Her Valoir**

By Harley Richardson

Filed away in the 'Great LPs I've bought for one quid' section of my record collection is *'76 Kids Forever* by Sudden Sway. On its release in the late 1980s, this record totally failed to take the nation by storm, spending six months in the bargain bins of every second-hand record shop in Britain and then vanishing to a vinyl landfill site somewhere. No wonder. Ostensibly an 'Original Soundtrack' to an imaginary West End musical, *'76 Kids* sounded to many like an unfunny joke concept LP, and it's not hard to imagine any interest from the indie scene (it came out on Rough Trade) being killed off by the record's slick white soul-boy musicianship and bad tampon-advert aesthetics of the sleeve art.

But I love every track on this LP which, apart from a brief tap section, doesn't bear much resemblance to that of any West End show I've been to. Sure, it has the energy and exaggerated emotion but instead of pompous, sub-classical orchestral numbers we get compact, upbeat and catchy pop songs. Lyrically it does have certain elements in common with, say, *Jesus Christ Superstar* - for example the articulate, wordy, and mostly first-person narrative, as well as characters who break into song at the drop of a hat - but Sudden Sway can do much better than the mind-bendingly crass lyrics of Rice and Lloyd Webber. And of course we're also spared the dumb overblown visuals.

I'd agree with anyone who says that lyrically, *'76 Kids Forever* isn't very funny, but I claim that parody is only one part of what they were up to. Taking a swing at musicals is hardly difficult (or a gesture of much consequence) and I think I'd find a wholly ironic or superior attitude pretty unpleasant for that reason. In this case I reckon the 'concept' behind the LP is more than anything a convenient, if slightly strange, peg on which Sudden Sway hang their peculiar observations on life. Its subject matter concerns a loose bunch of friends in their early twenties who are in the process of seeing their dreams being superseded by a routine of jobs and weekend drinking and clubbing. But no

Bill Forsyth film, this: instead of a single-minded attempt to realistically portray an aspect of British culture, we get a string of stray and tangential thoughts running through the minds of the characters, mixed up with references from the far corners of the central theme and pulled into coherent and entertaining character studies such as 'Solo Store Detective Man' and 'I've got a Tinnitron Amusement Centre'. In this respect Sudden Sway are quite avant-garde. Their approach to narrative points your brain in many directions and leaves you to make of it what you will.

This is complemented by the background info which rounds out the package. There's a run-through of the (pretty mundane) plot which describes where the different songs fit, and a lyric sheet to tell us which character is singing at any point, identifying backing singers in appropriate places such as 'lunchtime business drinkers' or 'admin department'. There's also short pieces about the fictitious 'actors', weirdly treating them as if they were characters in the musical. All in all *'76 Kids Forever* makes a great excuse to skip your next trip to the West End.

Having been bitten by the Sudden Sway bug I was curious to find out how a band on a label like Rough Trade had developed so differently to the rest of 80s indiedom. A delve into the Sound Projector archives turned up several 45s and LPs which gave me some pointers. In 1980, the nucleus of Mike McGuire (vox and keyboards) and Pete Jostin (bass) were part of just another low-fi new wave combo. The single 'Jane's First Party.../Don't Go' was sparse, heavy on bass

and drums, with vocals and lyrics full of alienation. By the sound of it, the guitarist was new to the instrument, finding his way round this problem by abusing his guitar to achieve eerie effects. These same ingredients and methods have produced some great music - Sonic Youth's 'Burning Spear' for example. Sudden Sway doing the same thing sounded uncomfortable, the result kind of like The Cure on a particularly bad day: morose and aesthetically misled.

Shift forward to their 1983 Peel Session, where they had taken on a more conventional but artistically successful quality. For a start, the band (now with one Simon Childs on guitar) had learned to play. Their records from now on would belie all my preconceptions of what makes good music: Sudden Sway were slick, funky and professional, with slap bass in one hand and sequencer in the other, playing songs that reeked of composition over long deliberation in the studio rather than being born out of any musical rapport between band members.

But somehow they had something that set them apart from both their nearest mainstream relatives, best forgotten mid-80s bands like Hipsway and Hue & Cry and of middle of the road 'indie' groups such as Aztec Camera and Prefab Sprout. Now they'd got into their stride Sudden Sway had more musical sass than their peers, and even serious over-production couldn't hide the sheer vivacity of their tunes.

Their Peel Session featured a breezy mixture of song and spoken word comedy; their targets were perhaps slightly obvious, but it showed off a lightly cynical sense of humour which would be nicely sharpened in time for the next two singles, released in 1986: the infectious and punchy *Sing Song*, and *Autumn Cutback Job Lot Offer*. The latter contained a set of neat 30-second jingles, selling bogus items like the 'Desktop Germ Receiver' and 'Latest Autobation Rug', making a handy musical companion to the Innovations Catalogue.

By this stage Sudden Sway were putting a lot of effort into their packaging, making light-hearted digs at consumerism, and (no doubt infuriating their record company) releasing eight separate versions of *Sing Song*. They took to covering the sleeves with nonsensical logos and hilarious cut-up pseudo-marketing quotes - the kind of thing that U2 congratulate themselves for doing so earnestly, but much more fun! Through all this Sudden Sway attempted to stay anonymous, presenting themselves as a corporate entity rather than a band, although they were partly thwarted in this by Strange Fruit (who routinely document band line-ups on the covers of their Peel Sessions EPs).

After *'76 Kids Forever* I know of only one Sudden Sway release - *Ko-Opera*, another concept LP. This added some techno lines to the formula, but it now sounds sluggish and depressing. Perhaps the band needed a change of direction to avoid diminishing returns. One other LP was recorded but to this day remains unreleased.

I've no idea whether Sudden Sway ever toured - they were certainly tight enough to be practised live musicians. They were however prone to staging strange public events, which included a gig played over a telephone chatline, and a mystery treasure hunt starting from

Rough Trade shop in Covent Garden. I remember hearing that they spent a week inside a perspex cage in Canary Wharf, where any passers-by could request songs by pressing buttons on the outside of the cage. (*This was also seen on a BBC2 Saturday nights art programme at the time - Ed*). But this masochistic-sounding undertaking endears them to me all the more. You may have to search hard to find any of the records below. Let's look up and smile...

Thanks to Rhodi Marsden of the Penguin Rough Guide to Rock, whose Sudden Sway entry on the Internet filled some gaps in my knowledge.

Incomplete Sudden Sway Discography

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 1980 | <i>Jane's Third Party.../ Don't Go</i> 7" |
| | Chant CHANT 1A |
| 1981? | <i>To You With Regard</i> EP ? |
| 1984 | <i>Traffic Tax Scheme</i> |
| 1986 | <i>The Peel Sessions</i> 12" |
| | Strange Fruit SFPS 005 |
| 1986 | <i>Sing Song /Creative Marketing in 8 Dimensions</i> 7" |
| | Blanco Y Negro NEG 18V1-8 |
| 1986 | <i>Spacemate</i> 2 x LP |
| | Blanco Y Negro? |
| [1986] | <i>Autumn Cutback Job Lot Offer</i> 7" |
| | Rough Trade RT 183 |
| 1988 | <i>'76 Kids Forever</i> LP |
| | Rough Trade ROUGH 133 |
| 1987 | <i>The Barney Army</i> 7" |
| | Rough Trade RTT213 |
| 1989 | <i>Ko-Opera</i> LP |
| | Rough Trade ROUGH 142 |



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Keiji Haino

Blackbird Descending

Suitably admonished by Chris Cutler I have been reassessing my view of Haino somewhat. I have a Susan Sontag note in front of me which seems apt: 'The Romantics thought of great art as a species of heroism, a breaking through or going beyond. Following them, adepts of the modern demanded of masterpieces that they be, in each case, an extreme case - terminal or prophetic, or both.' By these lights Haino could be the last of the Romantics - I had been using say, Jackson Pollock as a visual guide, but perhaps John Martyn would be better. In any case, here's just three examples of CDs you might not want to blow your paycheck on unless you're a Haino completist.

Saying I love you I continue to curse myself, Blast First BFP-109 (1995)

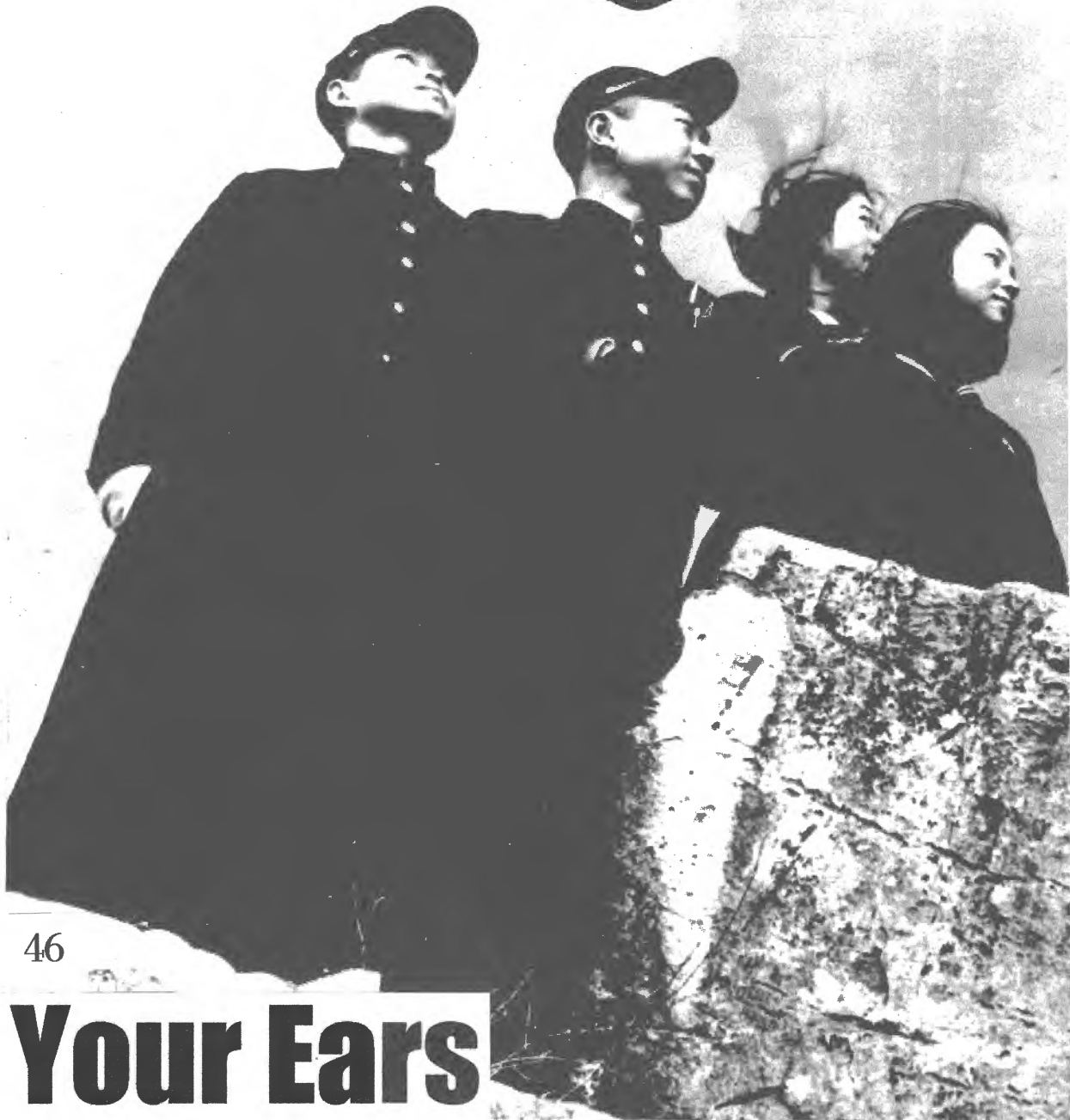
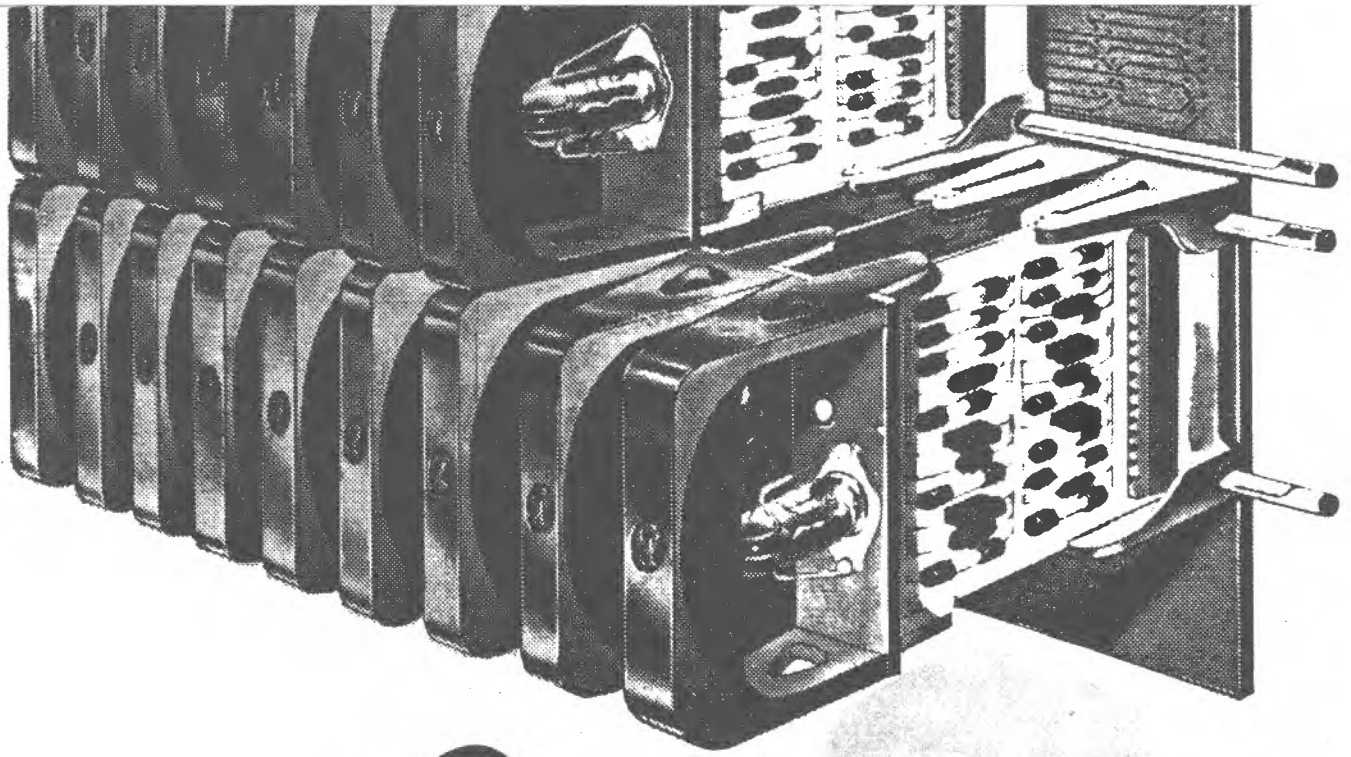
I had to get this as my memento of the blistering heatblast that I had witnessed at Disobey 94. But this unfortunately is a poor recording of it. Haino like many Japanese guitarists is an Emperor of Overload - not simply extreme volume, but denseness of sound enriched with every conceivable electronic effect. Sound as a weapon, a physical presence. The very air around Haino becomes charged with a million seething particles of hyper-saturated acoustical neurons. The recording process used here simply doesn't take this into account, and you experience that annoying cut-out effect which tells you the condenser in the microphone is waving the white flag, and whatever you end up with on the tape starts turning into a species of mucilage. So much for the technical shortcomings; this CD also fails to capture any of the excitement or tension of that evening. This was not the performance I saw, of which the intense clarity lacerated the listener like a forest of steel razor blades.

With Loren Mazzacane Connors: Live at Downtown Music Gallery, NYC 1 August 1992 Persona Non Grata #2, Father Yod FYPC06, (1995)

This is just plain dull. The sound of two strangers meeting for the first time and stalking around each other very carefully. The story of Haino coming to New York for the first time in ten years sounds more interesting, as does any story involving rare record collections, which is why on paper this record should have been a great idea, but it ain't. I've tried to be generous to this one. Save your money. Connors himself has made some more than decent records, one of which I hope to review in due course.

I Said, This is the Son of Nihilism, Table of the Elements, Ar 18 (Argon)

This is just too plain long. Hate to say it but after the first 20 minutes or so, Keiji is almost on auto-pilot. The piece starts out as an excellent raging monster, then switches midway into a gentler lyrical mode. The guitar sways into mandolin-like strumming, the voice sobs and moans. This yields up many moments of characteristically intense beauty, but somewhere Haino loses the thread a bit and starts sawing off the limb behind him. I'm unable to translate the lyrics, yet I wonder if there's a trace of needless self-pity creeping into the tenor. Finding the piece has nowhere left to go he carries on anyway for another 25 minutes. Having said this, it's a very high-quality recording that can hold its head up with any of the Japanese releases.



Are My Punching Bag

Bad-Nice Art

**Various Artists, Tokyo Invasion
Volume 1, Cosmic Kurushi Monsters,
Virgin TOKYO 1 (1996)**

**Resonance Volume 4, Number 2
Special Japanese issue. (Edited by
Clive Bell) ISSN 1352-722X. 60pp.**

As a cultural event and artefact this CD collection *Cosmic Kurushi Monsters* takes some beating, a pioneer compilation bringing a taster of the Japanese underground rock scene into the UK's high street chain stores. Available on budget-ish CD on major label Virgin, compiled by Tony Herrington, with deep background from such folks as Trevor Manwaring and Edwin Pouncey. The package eschews photographs of the artistes (and background information, unfortunately) in favour of a stunning state of the art Sav X line illustration sleeve with computer colouring.

Some of the early faithful are rubbing their chins thoughtfully and wondering if the UK audience are ready for these exotic Japanese delights to be so 'popularised'. Granted, the loudmouth at the Musica Transonic gig didn't get it, drunkenly misapprehending them as pure ego-meisters with loud guitars. John Bagnall tells me the NME reviewer was a bit bewildered by this comp, but conceded that here was rock music that had somehow bypassed the conventional blues-based route of development that so much rock music has followed. One way of seeing it is perhaps taking a cue from one of these Godzilla-like monsters on the cover - Jap NoiseCore artistes are insatiable inhuman creatures eating everything in their path. Consider the massive influx of popular music culture over the last 30 years, via records and discs, from the West into the East. The Japanese set up stations and sites for this material to thrive, on a gargantuan consumerist scale unknown to us Westerners; I believe they have entire record shops dedicated to the output of single bands! They listened and assimilated at a frightening rate, understood with quicksilver brains what makes this stuff work, and more importantly how to improve on the basic model. Like an evil computer they set to work rewiring rock into a cyborg simulacrum that surpassed the original. John Lennon asserted that three-chord rock'n'roll is like a perfectly designed chair that cannot be improved upon. The Japanese Underground is proving otherwise, right before our very eyes. If it's true that every permutation of rock has been exhausted then what are we listening to here? Perhaps a new strain of virus, a mutated gene? Then what fabulous monsters may result!!! This promises to be a fascinating phenomenon, one which is a particular 20th century thing, the near-instantaneous communication of ideas via electronic technologies, to generate a new faster, leaner, fitter form of global folk music.

This really shouldn't surprise us if we look at a parallel - for example the work of Tadanori Yokoo, a Japanese poster artist who since 1965 has been enthused by Pop Art and American graphic designers. Images of uncanny power have poured from his studios, delighting in the violation of visual taboos. In *100 Posters of Tadanori Yokoo*, New York Images Graphiques Inc 1978 (ISBN 0-89545-022-4), the editor writes 'If Japan has been voracious in its adoption of Western motifs, styles and goods, it has also been very savvy in first spotting the works of leading American posterists...Tomi Ungerer, Paul Davis and Milton Glaser.' Glaser himself, in the preface to this book, could almost be describing Boredoms music when he says 'In these collage-like works, Tadanori walks a risky line between the banal and the esoteric...masterful in his use of bad taste, compelling us to pay attention to his message by its sheer irritation value.' And on a personal note, I feel Yokoo's books have titles that read like Keiji Haino CDs: *An Escape to Incompletion*, 1970; *Groping in the Dark*, 1973; *A Dove flying from the Ark*, 1977; *My Zen Apprenticeship*, 1978...

If you read the special Japanese issue of *Resonance*, you may feel as I did that there is simply too much for the Western mind to cope with. To begin with, in the UK we've only been getting hints of the fecundity of the scene since the early 1990s, yet it's being going on for a long time before that. Secondly, you realise that Boredoms and Fushitsusha are 'big names' on the scene, just one part of the massive explosions of endeavour in the East. The very futility of understanding it defeats me, as does the apparently tenuous nature of the music's existence in some cases (microscopic editions). This issue is a fine job edited by Clive Bell, who gives a useful perspective - if Japanese culture has a traditional 'aesthetic...of empty space and tranquility, why not produce the densest, noisiest music anyone has ever heard?'. After 1870, he reckons, the country began to abandon its traditions and tried to 'swallow Western culture whole'.... Ed Baxter interviews Otomo Yoshihide about his 'shocking' music, who reveals that shock is simply a personal response of anger to society and things that cannot be changed; more established, older musicians hate his work! In his own article, Otomo gives a touching account of his adolescence haunting the 'jazz kissas', cafes in 1970s Tokyo whose proprietors played free jazz records non-stop - or any other music to their taste...Thurston Moore's story of his packing case full of obscure noisy cassettes makes the head spin. He bundled up some of them - including tapes by Violent Onsen Geisha and Volume Dealers - to assist in remixing a Yoko Ono track off her *Rising* LP, filling up dozens of free channels to transform an otherwise quiet and minimal recording...Stefan Jaworyzn makes a valiant attempt at compiling a complete Boredoms discography, a task he reckons is doomed from the start; only regretting now that he neglected to include catalogue numbers. 'We're not really into the chaos but we like the word chaos', they tell him. Boredoms in art-mode provide this issue's coup de grace, a centre-spread pen and ink drawing detailing the band's family tree / history in words and pictures...if Pete Frame had been a Manga artist, this would be the result.

Not for a minute would I consider myself an expert, but even so I felt relieved when I bought *Cosmic K* to find (a) that I'd heard of at least half of the performers and (b) I owned some of the original CDs from which these tracks were glommed. To these ears *CKM* is a topnotch selection box of choice names and performances, representing some

of the very cream of this music. From the PSF roster there's High-Rise, Musia Transonic, Keiji Haino, Boredoms and Ground Zero; from Skin Graft, the fairly useless Space Streakings and Melt Banana. The God Mountain artists include Hiahito's 'Metaric Machine', one of the quieter weirder tracks - a queasy yet steely synth behind a whispered prose poem. Optical*8 deliver the required mayhem in 'Halle Halle', solid chunks of nasty sneering full-on cheap brilliance, world-class music. Kato Hideki - who is also the main man of Bass Army - turns in 'Savage', a fantastic studio assemblage spotlights a disconcerting horn blowing over a wobbly guitar arpeggio with added loops of foreign material - it redefines the meaning of tension! Also of note is K K Null and Ichiro Agata's 'Love Isn't Blind', surely chosen because the guitar riff approximates the voice of Godzilla himself!

It has to be said Magical Power Mako remains a revelation and 'Blue Dot' is the track that does it for me every time. It's virtually a coda to the double CD set, and positioned directly after the all-out hysteria of contributions from High-Rise and Altered States. Mako is a mystical guru riding inside his blue mist, whipping up an ethereal maelstrom of excessive reverb, tape effects and guitar manipulation that defies belief. There's a gradual drifting apart of the track's constituent components, aided by split-second mixing technique, shifting elements from simpatico to antipatico in seconds. His effects devices just sit up and beg; where Keiji uses a battery of pedals and

amps to unleash his full-force magic, Mako deploys his machinery with surgical precision. The piece starts off as a whirling improvisation coming to pieces, then finishes as loops and echoed phrases dissolving into atomic substructures, then reconfigures into something else again. Unbelievable - a musical rendering of Continental Drift. Mako is a veteran underground genius on an equal footing with Haino, and has been producing records since 1973 at least. I'd buy more of his solo records if they weren't so darned expensive.

Melt-Banana, *Scratch or Stitch*, Skin Graft GR34 CD (1996)

These have one track on *Cosmic K* as above, which is probably quite adequate for anybody; I find an entire CD of this stuff is good fun for the first 10 minutes, then pretty annoying thereafter. It's that singer's voice, finally - the range of noises she squeezes out is just too limited, a straightjacket for your ears. She spits out dumb monosyllabic phrases in English, squealing away at top speed and mostly on one note. This is done over an equally hyperspeeded backing band, like a toy version of Napalm Death. Either that or of the Truman's Water school of unintelligibly fast musical gibberish. Steve Albini produced, but this is apparently the best he could get out of them - an unvaryingly shrill exercise that caterwauls like a hyperactive kid ODeD on chocolate and cola. Fine if you like your pop music to be dumb and meaningless



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**Che-Shizu,
Nazareth, Japan
PSFD-35 (1993)**

Astonishing, a record that remains palpably alien to Western ears throughout all of its hour-long duration, and grows stranger with each replay. Never more so than on the frighteningly intense last track 'Requiem', an extended improvisation that develops into the most exquisite controlled musical gibberish; an electronic sound so attenuated it can barely squeeze itself along the wires and out of the tiny amplifier. This is joined by keening and wailing sounds (sax? violin?) as despairing as the cries of the mourners carrying the funeral bier. The opening cuts are no less solemn and austere, huge bass drum and squeaky unbalanced violin sawings that suggest unknown liturgies. However, there's an approachable side too - Che-Shizu also try their hand at a garage-band beat combo impersonation; at least one track could almost be an undiscovered Pere Ubu live tape. In fact throughout there's an undeniable ghost of the Velvets here - with John Cale on viola and Nico on vox. These are all live recordings, mostly from 1987-1988, although the earliest was 1983. Retaining the lo-fi sound throughout was presumably a conscious decision - there is an aesthetic charm to rough edged recording and this CD exploits it successfully (in a way that the short-lived Riot Grrrl phenomenon did not). Marc Baines immediately responded to the palpable atmosphere and tension captured here. If High-Rise have taken (for example) Black Sabbath as a starting point, perhaps Che-Shizu's project involves the careful recreation of the vinyl bootleg sound. One is reminded of The Residents' rendering of *James Brown Live at the Apollo*, where they copied the original source with such excessively ironic perfection that the shrieks of the audience were carefully orchestrated, as if part of a musical score. A similarly effective homage is the photo here of Masami Shinoda playing his sax dressed in a raincoat, in a near-perfect emulation of a Charlie Parker stance!



**Cinorama, *Three Lies and a Ding-a-Ling Five*,
Japan PSFD-39
(1994)**

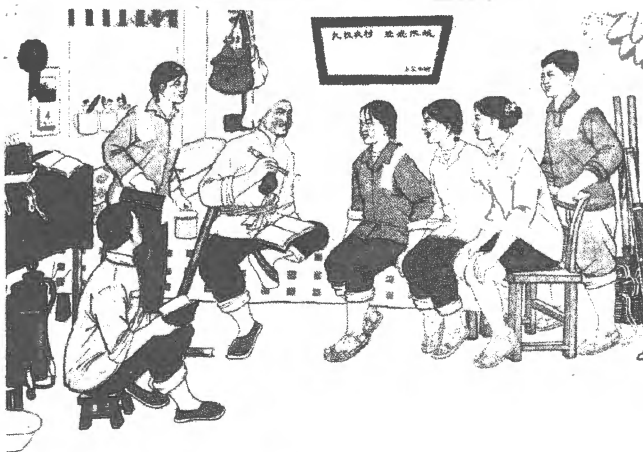
Bewitching, beguiling, a spiritual minimalist jewel in the crown of PSF. If nothing else, investigate to assure yourself that the Japan scene is not exclusively male-centred energy noisy rock derivatives: the leader here is Sakata Sachiyo, a female vocalist with a wiry vox, backed by two sensitive male performers Sakamoto Hiromichi and Ishizuka

Toshiaki, and it's one of the quieter records in the PSF catalogue to have reached us. Stunning musical effects are achieved by spare instrumentation: 'A Moon Cat' is simply echoed cello plucks, scrapey percussion and whistling. 'Manteau of a Shadow' whispers 'Bible, Bible, Bible Black' over a poignant synth. There's even a musical saw on 'After the Night Dream'. Everything's recorded with astonishing clarity so that each note slices into you like a frosty day in the mountains. The meaning of the songs however refuses that clarity - albeit lyrics sung in English, with Japanese titles sometimes translated - they remain allusive, mysterious, distant lights shrouded in fog. No introspection to be found here though - Cinorama are not woolly navel-gazing anchorites retreating from the world, rather I find a steely assurance in the delivery that is disconcerting, a stern corrective to one's excess and materialism. Not that the record lacks humour; for example, 'The Night and the Owl' is a nursery rhyme of a song which delivers the enchanting invitation, 'Everyone Everyone, join our magic lantern, Ho Ho Ho'. A beautiful package, an image of the musicians photographed so as to appear as if they're made of freshly cast plaster of paris like a George Segal sculpture, or as delicate as porcelain. Even the cliché of the three wise monkeys they can get away with. And some delightful miniature watercolours reproed in the booklet. They deserve to sell as many copies as Hugo Largo.





Once a coconut, now a monkey.



Ground Zero, *Revolutionary Pekinese Opera Ver 1.28*, ReR GZ1 (1996)

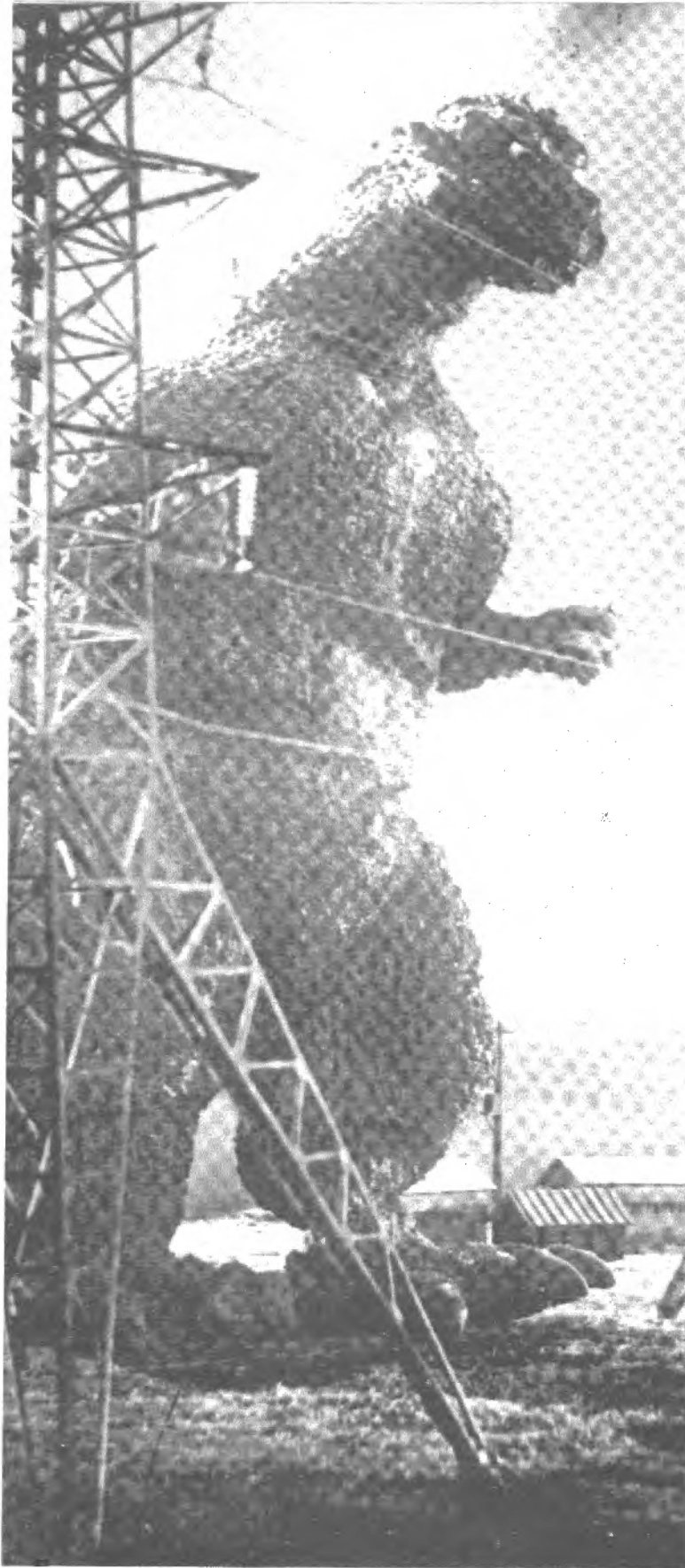
An unbelievable roller coaster ride for the lugs. So much sprawling chaos is brilliantly orchestrated, constantly veering between organisation (taut, focused control of sources) and chaos (the joyous splurging of spontaneity, accidents and noise and letting the turntables and samplers do what they want). Although each moment offers you a compressed network of startling collisions, edits and impenetrable layers of sound information, there remains a unity to the whole - it runs through a programme, starting from the samples of the actual opera (gongs and cymbals) to a nightmare movie apocalypse of noises and alarming shrieks, into 'Paraiso 1' - the most lyrical loops of slowed down female wailing with very romantic chords (this is the excerpt on *Kurushi Monsters*), into sheer abstract playfulness of the sounds of a stylus being put on records and swiftly removed again, interrupted by white noise and mysterious silences - is it ended or not? and then into the coda, a cheesy organ playing 'When you Wish Upon A Star' with toy bugles and birdsong.

Otomo Yoshihide is the dangerous genius mainman behind this project, along with the talents of assorted maniacs of guitar and electronics. Historical layers include an original 1960s recording of the opera and its later manipulation and additions by Alfred 23 Harth and Heiner Goebbels. Also a meticulous name-check of all the musicians and records that have been sampled for this item. It was originally on the Trigram label in Japan and sold out in 1995. Its appellation as Version 1.28 refers to this earlier edition, but also suggests that this item is like an updated computer programme.

I love a record that actually makes me feel like I'm dreaming, and this one does it. Partly achieved by the dense anti-linear anarchic effects, and the snippets of narrative given by tv and movie clips (or whatever source), but the most lovely disorienting feeling arises from hearing a record that you can't fathom out - it's impossible to work out how it was done, you can't believe it was possible. We need more records like this in the world, surely if everyone listened to *Pekinese Opera* then holes in the fabric of reality may soon start to appear.

Marble Sheep, *Shinjuku Loft*, Northampton, Cold Spring Records CSR 8 CD (1995)

Early-ish sketches (1988) from the Marble Sheep when they were comprised of members of Zeni Geva, Incapacitants and Hijokaidan, and though not an essential record it's not unpleasant. Some rather overfamiliar guitar riffs and overloaded Marshall amp sound, but all is played with that conviction that shows they (along with other JapCore bands perhaps) were feeling their way towards doing something amazing and different with this psychedelic rock style. So though it starts in the Velvets / MC5 mode, they occasionally push themselves into fiery solos and ring the changes on those basic hypno-riffs to add dynamics and texture. Licensed from Captain Trip records.

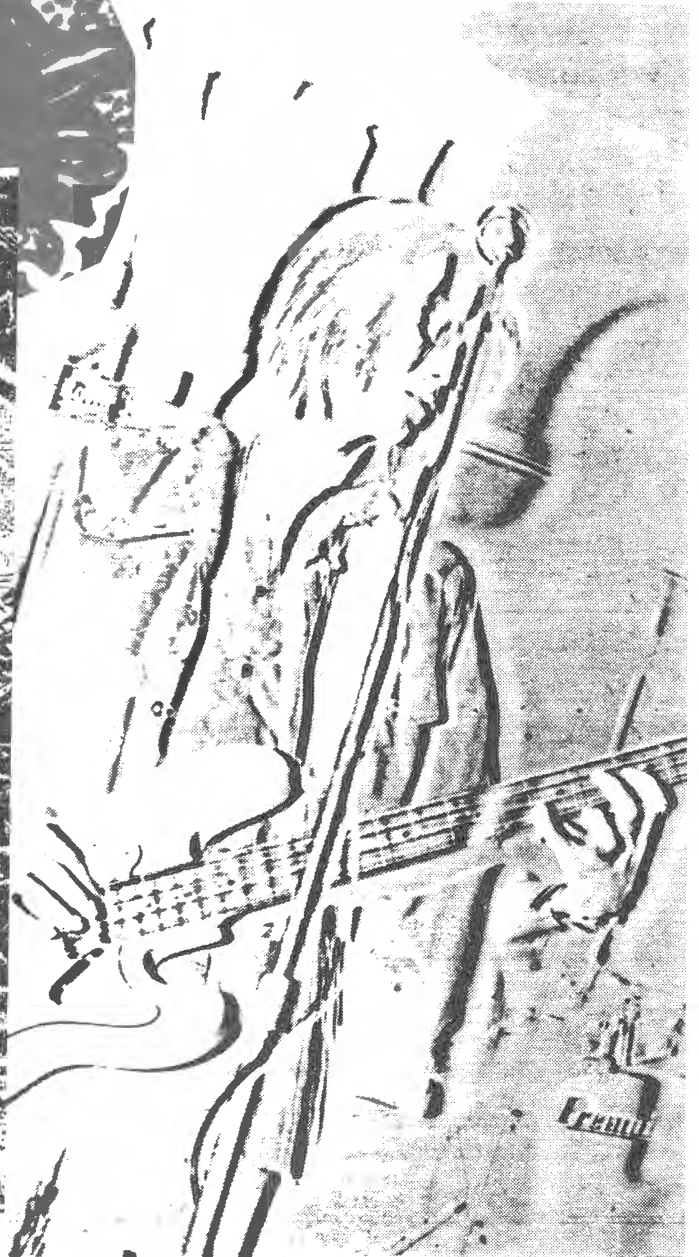


Musica Transonic + Toho Sara + Mainliner

**25th September 1996 @
The Powerhaus London**

An astounding event, and horrendously ill-attended; two gigs in London, one in Glasgow, and probably less than one hundred people in the audience at any one time. Note that personnel-wise we are dealing with the same trio for all 3 bands, in each case led by Asahito Nanjo; stylistically each is quite different. As Toho Sara the trio were joined by Mineko on Korg synth and played different instruments, including a formidable acoustic bowed device resembling a lute grown wild and strange; they set down to a mesmerising, fragile and unearthly droning improvisation of some 25-30 minutes, and sheer beauty is what they delivered. The Mainliner incarnation is somewhat more recent and produced relatively conventional power punk metal madness. Musica Transonic however remains the killer combination. A conventional power trip line-up for sure, but you have never witnessed such precision, such telepathic compatibility, combined with such extreme speed and volume. Their studio records are impressive, but the live experience beggars belief. Cutting to the chase is what it's all about - Makoto Kawabata's blistering guitar solos, that shoot immediately to the heart like a direct injection of a resuscitating drug. If a conventional psych solo needs a runway before take-off, then the Musica Transonic method must be a Harrier Jump Jet! The Powerhaus gig was marred by minor hiccoughs - repeated amplifier failure, dealt with in true stoic fashion by our inscrutable team; and a loud drunken bigmouth who took the view that such volume and mastery amounted to mere empty self-gratification. His ignorant yawns were more than merely annoyingly disruptive; they pointed out a massive gap of understanding and cultural difference, and made me ashamed to be English. No matter - this was one unforgettable experience brothers, powerful enough to drive even Harley R. running to the streets in agony!

FALLACY:



The Doom That Came To Sarnath

Reissues of obscure UK Prog Rock

In this brief overview we can only hope to scratch the surface of this rather specialised field. Quite simply, I've

bought so little of it. I went looking for certain elements: free-form improvisations, a pretentious 'cosmic' consciousness, extended and overblown solo histrionics in the performances. What I've found has been enjoyable enough, but it never quite delivers the goods...in the way that obscure Krautrock can for example, which is why I'm investigating that area with more attention. Here however a random run through a few of the aesthetic delights offered by these doomy 1970s English bands who rise up out of the murk like a Lovecraftian beast. Knowing next to zero about which of these might be listenable and which might prove to be total dogs, I've bought blind - and as a consequence, I've also had to listen deaf - and it shows. Decisions were partly informed by a vague and nebulous conception lurking at the back of the brain - a prejudged notion of what decent prog rock could be. More on this wispy conceit below.

Starting in the 100% gloomoid zones, Dark and Andromeda are true masters of portentous moanings. **Andromeda, Return to Sanity, Background HBG**

122/5 (1992) is a reissue of 1969 recordings. The sleeve notes connect the personnel with pop-psyche band The Attack, who once sneered at the vacuity of the fashion world in 'Created By Clive'; and The Five Day Week Straw People, whose sole LP is a nasty satire of 'The Straights' in then-contemporary society. With Andromeda John Du Cann directed his spleen against the hypocrisies of the drug culture. This record is quite simply the sound of the hippy dream already beginning to turn sour - the lyrics are filled with disillusionment and bitterness, sentiments backed up by the doomy music. The title track alone is a horrible anthem of doom, marching its listener towards a terrible fate, martial snare drums punching home the power riffs; although it soon segues into some nice chanting monk voices over a deep river riff, perhaps anticipating Width of a Circle two years later. You could read 'return to sanity' as a stark warning to the hippies, ie stop taking LSD now and rejoin the real world! - and 'Garden of Happiness' is no less acerbic about the empty promises of the Woodstock era. Du Cann's critical stance and austerity may be a key to the development of prog out of psychedelia - that is, Prog Rock represented a movement fuelled by a cynical 'Won't Get Fooled Again' scepticism - although few recorded items I've yet found are as specific in this way.

Incidentally I feel this pessimism paves the way for the later Apocalyptic Message-of-Doom Progressive Rock, as typified by ELP and early King Crimson for example. This may be largely attributable to the lyrics of Peter Sinfield. His classic phrase 'Confusion will be my epitaph' is surely axiomatic to any understanding of Prog. No crasser example of his overblown pretensions exists than the absurd paranoia of 'Karn Evil 9' on *Brain Salad Surgery*, 1973.

Dark feature quite good guitar work from Steve Giles and Martin Weaver, who when they finally reach their solo platforms can often shine brilliantly; concentrate on their playing and don't judge them on their



Acme AC8009LP. There is some duplication between these, although the latter features much more fitting sleeve art, and extra track 'All Through the Night'.



about suffering at the hands of 'evil' women soon becomes monotonous.

sometimes rather indifferent and clunky songs. They crank up the distortion, but never layer on quite enough of it; although 'ZeroTime' features one of their more successful riffs and disruptive wah-wah stabs. The lyrical content usually defaults to vague images of a lonely cheated man (never a woman!) facing the vicissitudes of a cruel and elemental world; not much further on from King Lear, in fact. Two reissues which appeared in the 1990s are **Dark, Kissing Spell KSCD 9204 (1992)** a comp of 1971-72 recordings, and **Artefacts from the Black Museum,**

Lifting us up from this swamp of despair are the flashes of hope in **The Wicked Lady, The Axeman Cometh, Kissing Spell KSCD 9307 (1993)**: it's the Martin Weaver show again! An interminable racket burblingly sold to us as '60.24 minutes of wah-wah hell' and stressing that it was recorded in a basement, to further plunge us into mental solitary confinement. The brutal simplicity is good, at times as primal as Pebbles garage bands, but there's a lot of sludge to wade through before you hit a seam of glittering axe-work. The title track has added choppy 'cello' guitar overdubs; 'Wicked Lady' is fourth-rate Hendrix copyism which soon deteriorates into mediocrity. Again, the lyrical themes are nowheresville - adolescent whining



What better way to end this sojourn in bleak November nights than curling up with **Second Hand, Reality, Essex 1006 (ND)** - recorded in 1968: Second Hand gleefully inform us at peak volume 'The World Will End Yesterday'. With Kenny Elliot's keyboards battling Bob Gibbons guitars, backwards tapes, intoning chants, way too much

studio echo and its general air of overproduction, this item rates as proto-prog by dint of its ponderous pretensions and sheer excess. This cut was also issued on *Rubble 8* (KIRI 051) by Bam-Caruso in 1991.

And then there's **Astral Navigations, Background HBG 122/1 CD (1992)**,

recorded in 1970. Dave Wood and Mike Levon were the talented unknown producers who called themselves (or this project) Holyground; this LP was privately pressed and has become highly sought-after as the legend of its existence grew out of proportion. It's a good record in anyone's book. Two bands are showcased (presumably sharing a side each of the original vinyl): Lightyears Away and Thundermother. Lightyears Away spotlighted Brian Calvert's songs for four tracks, each with spot-on arrangements of outstanding crispitude, mostly acoustic guitar-led with nice organ and recorder backdrops; his 'Fourth Coming' has topographic and natural history imagery layered with some rather vapid philosophising, about Mankind's journey through life. 'The Astral Navigator' edges into cosmic territory and has the brief Apollo 13 sample at the end; it's charming, but so British - a Boy's Own Space Annual vision of space travel. Then in a quite different mode, Chris Carrodus-Coombs delivers a trilogy of songs, which although a tad overlong in performance are lyrically very dense - packed with complex ideas. Particularly 'North Country Cinderella (Tomorrow)', a lyrical love-song spiked with determinedly gritty and urban imagery, refusing conventional pleasantries of romance. These tracks are well-crafted studio masterpieces, enhanced by fine distort guitar licks from a young Bill Nelson (later of course leader of Be-Bop Deluxe), treated pianos and harmony choirs, the overall effect coming close to a home-made movie soundtrack lushness. 10cc could have learned a lot! The second band Thundermother are more straightforward, unreconstructed gtr-drms-bass boogiemasters but none the worse for this. Their 'Boogie Music' matches Zappa's 'Willie the Pimp' for high-testosterone energy and usually gets me cavorting around the room. Perhaps this lack of inhibition - even a certain naiveté - is what the prog collector seeks out as an antidote to the more established, popular names and their attendant familiarity - to say nothing of their stereotyped methods of playing.

I admit to a soft spot for **Arzachel's** sole eponymous LP, chiefly for the Hammond organ on 'Queen Street Gang' - also called 'Soul Thing', but it evinces no soul whatsoever! This lazy 12-bar strut lumbers along blissfully ignorant of the concept of syncopation; somewhere around the 200th bar the organ player starts pushing his effects manuals and diapasons, which varies the boredom somewhat. 'Azathoth' would threaten to become 'Jerusalem' (which ELP also once

memorably murdered in Grand Guignol style) were it not for the discordant instrumental break which hoves into earshot like a slowed-down ambulance siren. Most of side two is devoted to the excessive yawn-a-thon 'Metempsychosis', where the guitar and organ are so attenuated by the spacey production they're practically in the next room. You too can be impressed by the singular lack of development in this flabby track - progressive rock that doesn't actually progress. Arzachel were Egg plus Steve Hillage, so that's Dave Stewart on the organ. The magic marker sleeve art confirms all your worst nightmares about drug-addled hippies - it's the worst album cover in history! I have a very bad pirate copy on Satori SAT 1005, which I suspect has been mastered at the wrong speed, although an Edsel CD pressing has been sighted.

So with some relief we turn to **Octopus, Restless Night, Essex 1013 LP, ND** (1970

recording) and **Steel**

Mill, Green Eyed

God, Essex 1012

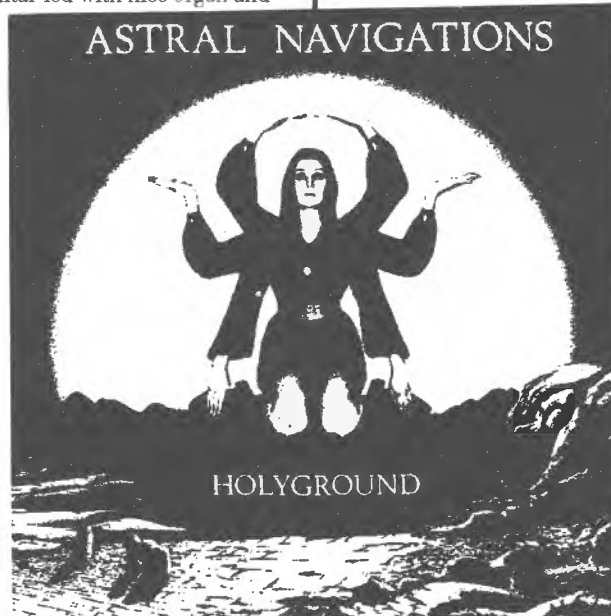
LP (1975 recording): both

more in the song-writing pop-psych vein and not too far away from the Rubbles series that enriches my life so much. One of many fifth-division bands who learned their lessons perhaps from Walrus-period Beatles, Octopus make a highly agreeable noise, a crisply played set of well-constructed songs and a prime example of journeyman period work;

we veer from visions of grim Tower-Block Britain ('Council Plans') to gypsy fantasies ('Queen and the Pauper'). Steel Mill are even less exceptional, and sadly don't really deliver the promise of their wonderful bargain-basement surrealism sleeve.

In the Folkier vein, we offer up but one example: **Spiral Sky, ACME AC8002LP**, a very pleasant

overlooked fragment of proggy folk. How many sub-Fairport Convention bands were around in the 1970s? The band manage a decent chiming and droning musical backdrop throughout the LP, which is marred only by the voice of lead singer Kata Kolbert. She's just slightly off-key on most performances, and lacks the breath control necessary for precise phrasing - a defect most noticeable on her walk through 'Bold William Taylor'. But she does maintain unemotional poise throughout the violent and sexy story on that traditional snatch of English Folk. Among their own compositions, 'Slime Pits' is a weird anti-cult rant - 'Holy Words, a Holy waste of time' - with subliminal distort voices of the bogus priests mumbling at the end. 'The Dear Cat's Whiskers' is a real winner too, sung charmingly accapella with an intimacy the rest of the set lacks, and should win a prize for its lyrics, which are mostly corny Tin-Pan Alley style but thrown out of whack by the occasionally arresting phrase.





The Doom that Came to Venezuela

Latin-American Prog

I wanted to make a plea for this fascinating sub-genre, if such it be. In no small measure we have to thank the great Hugo Chavez-Smith for reissues on his Essex 'Serie Delujo' label, and his Background label. You'd never stand a chance of seeing or hearing original issues of these gems, which now command excessive collector's prices. I just find something touchingly sincere about all these bands - their music is simple, direct and naive, some would even find it childish. As examples of an idiom they're probably relatively unimportant - derivative of a scene that is not their own, mimicking sounds and gestures of UK bands (which in their turn were mimicking USA musicians), in no way influencing others, or developing this mode of music.

Yet as examples of the pure joy of music-making these records have few equals. If we grasped at a visual parallel, you could seize upon the currently well-known and very popular Mexican Day of the Dead art. This is an example of a genre that gets stuck somewhere (and becomes very stereotyped, but remains powerful) - introduce Catholic liturgical art to a peasant culture, and they'll mix it up with their own preoccupations about ghosts and death. Sugar skulls and papier-mâché skeletons of enormous potency and vibrant colourful design result.

If this sounds like some I'm edging towards a patronising Third World field study, please pass on to the next page. But don't pass up hearing a record as unhinged and perplexing as **Kris Kringle's *Todos Los Derechos Reservados* (1968)**. True to its seasonal name this offers a real Christmas gift in gaily coloured wrapping paper, and accordingly presents us with a child's eye view of psych-pop. In fact, the band themselves seem childishly overjoyed to be making a record at all, and treat the studio like the world's biggest sweetshop. They make bizarre use of sound effects, for example we start off with a young man humming a tune to himself before he slips off the embankment and is crushed to death by a passing steam train. On one track harpsichords and trumpets dance a gavotte like children at the school fancy dress party in Victorian costume. As the record is sung in the native tongue, I'm excused the impossible task of interpreting these lyrics - whose content may not be as exotic as I choose to imagine, especially in the case of the varispeeded voice on 'Historia de un Loto...'

delivering some mock-solemn chant over a conventional 12-bar backing - sounding like a forgotten cousin to Speedy Gonzales. Angle Records bootied this as Angle 45 in 1993, and pressed 300 copies working from the only known existing original copy. The Genocidio en Vietnam cover was aptly described as Francis Bacon meets OXFAM!

Aguaturbia were a nifty beat combo from Chile with added bonuses of psychedelic guitar solos and, best of all, the wild voice of an unknown female singer. This shrill wailing of hers stops you in your tracks and dislocates your hearing bones inside your skull - she's a real Throatwobbler Mangrove! Their name means 'Choppy Waters' in English, and hearing this de-centred vocal is certainly only one stage away from being set adrift on the Cape of Good Hope in a rubber dinghy. 'Rock de la Carcel' here unsurprisingly turns out to be 'Jailhouse Rock', sung in English in such ways as to make you wonder if she has any idea of the lyrical content? No matter, they get down with the song and take it at breakneck pace. They made *Volume 2* in 1970 and a bootleg surfaced in 1991 on Mexcal (LP 1) with Mexican art on the cover; it's the Essex version (1002 LP) you need as it faithfully reproduces the Crucifixion cover. This is a stunning bit of photography collage, the flattened perspective of the girl on the cross bringing to mind Dali's famous visionary painting of St John of the Cross. My guess is that no irony or commentary is intended by this invocation of the crucifixion, which there emphatically would be if this was a UK Prog band.

Also of interest:

***Kissing Spell* by Los Pajaros,**

Essex 1001, contains the touching song 'Jim and the Blind Man' opening with some lush major seventh chords strummed over the sound of the ocean, leading into a charming story where Jim is taught to play the flute - 'Oh that will be grand!' he chortles, as a recorder plays sweetly over seagull cries. A real moment of tenderness...maudlin perhaps, but so what? It beats McCartney any day....**Laghonia's**

***Etcetera*, Essex 1004**, rarely disappoints - at last a druggy reference in 'Mary Ann', endorsing her unique properties for inducing mental oblivion, they warble 'Oh you take my mind away!' over a heavy bass and slow pulse, before freaking out with a 'wild' guitar solo over clunky

bongos; and they manage low-grade social criticism in 'I'm a Nigger' - 'Everybody hates my race!' The closest of the Argentine rockers to Pink Floyd perhaps, although 'Everybody on Monday' is sheer poppy delight and 'Speed Fever' is an unaffected motorcycle paean - 'the wind blows your hair, the sun makes your glasses shine'... **Traffic**

Sound, Background HBG 122/13 (1993)

is closest to the spirit of 1967 of this batch, the nearest model perhaps is *The Notorious Byrds Brothers* - although their producer is no Gary Usher! This is most noticeable on 'Chicana Way' which overdubs Jean Pierre Magnet into a one-man horn section while the lead guitarist approximates a pedal steel sound. Traffic Sound achieve some pleasing

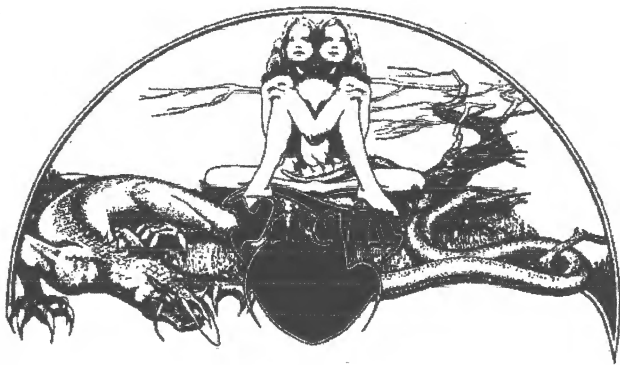
melodies and bright sunshiney chords, although we're a tad let down by the tepid vocals of Manuel Sanguinetti - still, his dissipated tone is very apt on the opening druggy cut, 'Tibet's Suzettes', which proposes that we all start gobbling hash balls like pancakes. Lyrically, the strikingly clumsy grammar of this ritornello is the closest they come to a Bob Dylan humoursque... **Ladies**

WC, Essex 1009

CD is also squarely in the Beatles-Stones-Dylan camp, but layered with more US West Coast psychedelia influences - as Edwin Pouncey points out in his humorous fictionalised account of the band meeting up in the Amazonian rain forests. Indeed, every other cut here could be by any faceless British R'n'B band with harmonica / tambourine driven riffs. But the LP is redeemed by its amusing use of sound effects segueing each song - starting with a toilet flushing, the sequence leads through a boxing match, an orchestra tuning up, a jet taking off (edited

next to 'Put that in your pipe and smoke it', yet another Byrds link: 'Eight Miles High' / 'Lear Jet song'), a car crashing, glass breaking, a fairground pipe organ. A gurgling brook fades into 'To walk on water', a winsome peace-n-love ditty replete with spanish guitars, recorders, and the most inept use of a xylophone ever put to recording tape; melodically it's a virtual simulacrum of 'As we go along' from The Monkees' *Head*, so I would suggest you try using Ladies WC as a possible alternative soundtrack to this film - a little programming is all it takes!





False Nostalgia - don't trust it

I have contrived this completely artificial journey through what I perceive as some of the varying modes of prog-rock - moving myself 'Out of the Dark and Into the Light', as per The Wicked Lady's suggestion. We can make no apologies for the sketchiness of this trajectory, which neglects countless key names from the history of obscure prog. Note that some of the items above were not on major labels - originally private pressings, or produced out of the group's own pocket, underscoring that whatever success they enjoyed was largely provincial and local. At best what I can glom from this sampling is a kind of nostalgia - which I freely admit to - a nostalgia for a time I never had. There were brief exposures to flashes of then-unfamiliar records during my sojourn at boarding school in 1973 - etched in my memory are little fragments of this time, like the LP

cover to Budgie (an atrocious Welsh HM band); the riff to 'Pick up the Pieces' by Hudson Ford; and most emphatically 'Spirit in the Sky' by Norman Greenbaum. Even today you can practically hear the long hair and beards in these snippets.

But Prog for me really starts in 1975, when I first started buying records in a big way, and with no thought at all yielded to pressure of fellow sixth-formers at my school in Everton - going for the obvious big-sellers and major players. Such a list comprises Genesis, Pink Floyd, Yes, Supertramp, Rick Wakeman, King Crimson...and in the hard rock mode, Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin. In such a context, even bands like Camel or Barclay James Harvest seem slightly recherche! The camp of pseudo-intellectual pompercy fell by the wayside for me, although I now return to the Sabs and Zep with a renewed appetite.

The point is that in 1971-1972, surely the years when heavy-duty prog thrived, I was still mired in the delights of Radio One and the charts, contented with a diet of teenybopper (Donny Osmond) or Glam (Gary Glitter, The Sweet). Only in thinking back do I madly imagine I was (somehow) listening to the ghosts of prog and krautrock which might be swimming around somewhere in the atmosphere. Which is conceivable in a way if you believe that sounds never really 'die', they just keep echoing around the universe. From the droning extended passage in The Aztecs' 'Most People I Know think that I'm Crazy' - which was in the charts in 1972 - it may have been possible to conjecture that somewhere out there, whole LP sides (not just 60 seconds instrumental break on a 45 rpm single) were devoted to making noises like this. This is what I mean by a false nostalgia. We're slipping into some metaphysical nonsense here - a low-grade form of time travel perhaps.

A simpler view is that I just like to dig up weird records which were around when I was alive, but by no stretch of the imagination could I ever have bought them (or even seen them, in most cases). The truth is hardly anyone bought this stuff at the time. Much of your fourth-division UK prog was issued on budget-priced labels, probably poorly distributed, and destined to end up in the bargain bins at WH Smiths in no time, or else recalled to be melted down in the vast bubbling cauldrons of reprocessed vinyl - Purgatory for LPs!. If you have any music publications from the 1970s, a glance through the adverts will reveal what music was prominent at the time. I have *ZigZag* 37 from 1973 in front of me, with full-page ads for such blandies as Stealers Wheel, Kiki Dee, Gallagher and Lyle, Donovan. All of these examples above sadly demonstrate the kind of confidence and faith a record company had in their roster of prog bands.

Of course, the listeners can be equally revisionist. John Bagnall has suggested how significant the punk 'movement' in this country was, and how after 1976 a new orthodoxy quickly took hold, and we couldn't wait to throw out any music associated with Dinosaurs and Boring Old Farts. For many years, to listen to anything remotely proggy was admitting to the love that dare not speak its name. This reissue phenomenon - and the apparent growth in the collectors' market for 1970s records generally - shows that there is still a presence, still an interest. Perhaps the hippies

and druggies never go away - or spawn new generations of their ilk. Mark Robinson has noted this depressing 'inescapable miasma' phenomenon, possibly unique to UK culture.

Another way to account for the appeal of an obscure prog item is principally its obscurity - the simple fact of its unavailability and uncommercial nature somehow associates it with other obscure, unavailable and uncommercial musics - eg free improvised music, and by a twist of thinking this can justify the quality of the music. A dangerously elitist thought-crime, mayhap! There's something of an illicit thrill in dissing the (popular) Pink Floyd on the one hand, but smugly asserting that (relative unknowns) Dark were a fine band - a kind of 'safe' way of enjoying a generally despised genre.

The conclusion I draw from all this is an issue of redemption - it's a feeling of 'rescuing' some poor unknown record from the limbo of poor sales performance, and by giving it more airings than it could possibly have enjoyed first time around, one is taking part in a sort of grand altruistic project - like adopting war orphans or something. The big guys have had their due, now let's hear from the nameless forgotten souls! The reissuing of these obscurities is a healthy riposte to the major record companies - who I feel have a vested interest in maintaining a pecking order in the minds of record-buyers - 'A Lists' and established hierarchies of so-called 'Great Rock bands'. The more past music there is available, then it can only improve our perception of what's good and what's bad, and help us to rethink the accepted lines of development and influence in rock music. It expands history. This is why I believe that if I choose to privilege even something relatively ordinary like Octopus in favour of what the rock establishment pushes my way, it can be something more than just acting like some foppish elitist who dabbles in obscurity.

Who is reissuing these records, and why?

Tread with caution here and let's try and separate out the different strands of activity here. The first two categories are official, record-company based records; the second two are in the bootleg-ish area.

An official reissue by the originators

Brought out by the record company who owned the original recording. Thus for example the recent 'deluxe' edition of the first Black Sabbath album - in proper gatefold mode and pressed on heavy vinyl. A record like this has probably remained in print with its parent company ever since its first issue. At least in a case like this they should have access to master tapes and original printing plates, unless they've been carelessly discarded.

An official reissue, but done by another company

For example, the Decal reissue (LIK 12) of *On the Shore* by Trees, a 1970 album originally on CBS 64168. The principle is that Decal paid for the rights to do this, so presumably

mechanical royalties continue to be paid. The reissue features original sleeve art or a good facsimile of same. They probably used master tapes.

'RE' = An unofficial reissue by fans

The aim is to produce a replica LP, a reproduction of a prog rock item so rare that you'll probably never see an original copy in your life. The vinyl is remastered working from the best available copy. Modern technology allows the possibility of removing crackles and clicks, by sampling either side of such a glitch. The sleeve art is rephotographed and replicated exactly as in the original issue (eg Spring's triple gatefold photograph by Keef, easily a match for his fine work on Black Sabbath). And Essex's *Octopus* should win a prize for that gatefold cover alone, a true masterpiece of 1970s kitsch painting. The original catalogue number is used. The label is the same. Nobody tries to pass it off as an original copy at a ridiculous price (unless they're stupid), it's just a public spirited gesture by members of the collector-fan fringe, to share neglected music. An aural fanzine! However, it is my guess that neither record label nor artistes make any money out of this. On the other hand, it's equally likely that the people doing the RE also lose out financially. There may be a strain of RE manufacturers who do try and palm off their product as an original, but I have not encountered any; in any case, rephotographed sleeve art announces itself immediately to anyone with a pair of eyes. One of my favourites in this vein is a vinyl RE of *Tone Float* by The Organisation (SF 811); the sleeve reproduced had a portion of the art torn off, which the fan-owner had attempted to restore with his Derwent coloured pencils. Further, the paste-up artist (who knew little about process blacks) cut out and repasted the title and the RCA Victor logo.

Re-Treads

Similar to a RE, except these are quite often on CD format instead of vinyl. They might feature new sleeve art and new catalogue numbers. ACME items on vinyl always come issued in a plain master bag; the sleeve art and notes are printed on A3 glossy paper, spray-mounted and wrapped around the master bag, thus sealing it. Sometimes Retreads are more like compilations, in that they add bonus tracks not part of the original release. Some of them (eg Andromeda) appears to have been done in collaboration with a member of the original band, which reassures one that payments are going where they're due.

It is only through the medium of the reissue that I've stood any chance of hearing this turgid nonsense - CDs (and limited edition vinyl) have rescued these hidden treasures from the dustbin of fashion. The only other option would be to spend enormous sums at collector's fairs. This price tag aspect is not one I have cared to dwell on at this time, yet it seems to be a useful frame of reference for some. Some dealers can tell us nothing about a rare record other than it commands a hefty dig into one's wallet.

The Listening Post.

Digging up Popular Prog



with John Bagnall

Who's afraid of Prog Rock?

One sunny Saturday afternoon about 18 months ago, I was skimming through a newspaper's TV preview page. My eyes alighted on some promotional slop about 'Dancing in the Streets', a then forthcoming comprehensive rock survey. The series producer was boasting of how broad in sweep and catch-all his magnum opus would be - the lucky viewer was promised miles of dazzling footage from the last 40 rockin' years. We'd be taking in the birth of the unruly rock beastie, with its blues 'n' gospel parentage through to Elvis, the Fab Four, Soul, Folk Rock, Psych, Woodstock, Glam, Punk, Disco, er, Live Aid, Hip-Hop, right up to today's Ambient and Techno. Alright, I mused, why should I pass up the chance to let my eyeballs soak in moments like Iggy Pop falling flat on his sweaty face circa 1970, or to gawp again at the orchestrated circus of anorexia that was a 1965 Motown roadshow. I suppose we all have our iconic favourites.

Then came the supposed clincher. The produced concluded (perhaps with a knowing smirk) 'We certainly won't be featuring any Prog Rock'. Well of course not. Perish the thought. For about twenty-something years it's been a universally agreed axiom that 70s Progressive Rock is only there to be despised. The genre that apparently led rock into a histrionic cul-de-sac is only ever mentioned when we recall 1977 was the year we were saved from such sins. Otherwise

Prog can be safely written out of rock history and any embarrassment will thereby be niftily evaded.

You get no prizes for guessing I found 'Dancing in the Streets' predictably selective. But you're not about to suffer a table-thumping fan's-eye defence of Prog Rock's excesses or worse still a claim that it's still alive via those dire-sounding contemporary outfits you see listed in the back pages of *Q* and *Mojo* (Regenesis, Solstice and Spock's Beard to name but three).

My gripe, hopefully along with much of this mag's small readership, is that prevailing critical orthodoxy has become increasingly hard to swallow. Like some Soviet-era youth dissatisfied with the biased history of his Stalinist schoolbooks I find the post-punk consensus not just wearing thin but altogether worn out. In my experience rock hardly ever follows homogenous or tidy lines of development; in fact, some of its triumphs lie in detours of brazen stupidity. It's OK to invoke benchmarks of quality or key moments of 'revolution', be they The Beatles, Sex Pistols or The Velvet Underground, but count me out when these models become diluted nth-generation ghosts, be they Britpop, Three Colours Red or some whining sophomore discovering Lou Reed for the first time.

Maybe I'm talking after the tide has turned. A stroll through today's CD Hypermarket seems to reveal the triumph of post-modern pluralism. In true democratic fashion once dubious items, now reissued, nestle right next to those thought 'hot' and 'cutting edge'. Increased choice makes record company fat-cats even fatter but it also breaks down the power of the taste-makers. The rehabilitation of former musical no-nos like Easy Listening and German Cosmische Rock is perhaps just the start of a great shattering of taboos. Journalist Paul Stump has weighed in with a brave booklength defence of bad ol' Prog itself: *The Music's All*

That Matters (Quartet 1997). The salivating collector's market in obscure UK 70s Prog has been evident for some time and is covered by Ed elsewhere in this issue. But surely the experience of buying and hearing rare Prog by the likes of Andromeda, Elias Hulk or Arcadium is inevitably coloured by the hipness-quotient of digging out and possessing arcane nuggets of vinyl archaeology? These artefacts often only differ from their more famous counterparts by virtue of original poor sales and promotion. Can we stick our necks out and also find some (illicit) pleasure in 70s Prog items which sold by the truckload? Just maybe. Abandon all hope ye who enter here...

Moogs on Ice

In the early to mid-70s every record buying white kid who wasn't strung out on Glam or Northern Soul would be sure to have a gatefold Prog item by ELP, Genesis, Greenslade, Camel or Yes stuffed into his army surplus knapsack. Hurriedly, these grease-haired teens would scurry into their Roger Dean postered bedrooms, lift up their teak veneer hi-fi's smoked plastic lids and slip on a glistening black vinyl LP with its l-o-n-g complicated tracks, little knowing they'd later be regarded as a generation of misguided lepers. Let's give the devil his due and remind ourselves, according to the consensus, of the main popular crimes of these Prog years.

Virtuosity - following the bolstering respect rock received as an artform via the explorations of The Beatles and psychedelia, the 70s Prog artists took heart and ran with the baton about 100 miles further. Aping the technical prowess of classical or jazz musicians, the Progster sought to impress with tricky, technically difficult displays of expertise. A background at the Royal College of Music, like the be-caped Rick Wakeman, was judged more cool than being some self-taught three chord bozo. Individual group members became stars in their own right, like a celebrated soloist of Paganini status. Witness the equal billing for ELP's Carl Palmer, centre-stage with a drum kit so gargantuan you'd think it'd require arm-extensions to play. A peek at the inner sleeve photos of *Fragile* by Yes displays guitarist Steve Howe posing in a circle of about twenty string instruments and from his confident glare you just know he can play them all. While more experimental Prog outfits took inspiration from the 20th century avant garde (see Henry Cow) the mainstream giant's symphonic leanings resulted in many overblown workings of middlebrow classics.

Pretension - again following 60s lyrical and conceptual developments Prog aimed to 'progress' beyond the three minute pop song. With literary aspirations abounding, the 7-inch single was far too shrimplike a vehicle to contain the epic imagination of the Progster. Jon Anderson, a vegetarian waif from Chorley, had already wowed fourth-formers with clumsy cod-mystical lyrics for Yes like 'Siberian Kahtru', and 'Total Mass Retain' and ventured on to compose *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, whose theme was the four parts of the Shastric scripture. With immodest Prog logic Yes spread the project interminably over four LP sides. Darker lyrical appetites might have found some

masochistic pleasure in Van de Graaf Generator's concepts, such as the impenetrable pessimism of 'A plague of Lighthouse Keepers'. And if musical companions to the early 70s fad for Sword'n'Sorcery were required then surely Bo Hansen's *Lord of the Rings* (three volumes condensed onto one LP!), Steve Hackett's *Voyage of the Acolyte* and Dave Greenslade's *Pentateuch of the Cosmology* fitted the bill?

A concept wasn't a concept realised if it

couldn't be staged with Wagnerian grandeur. Peter Gabriel's array of characters / creatures required both costumes and masks and culminated in *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* show. Here Gabriel appeared in a boil-encrusted seven foot latex outfit which refigured Mr Blobby by a good fifteen years. But perhaps Rick Wakeman's inflated spectacles go one step further into bloated kitsch and represent the late-Pro super-ego in excelsis. *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* demanded not only a choir and scenery but an ice rink arena and chocolate voiced David Hemmings as narrator.

Quality Control. How can anyone defend such monstrosity? By invoking a tendency in art to the epic, the grand gesture? Possibly, but to deny that such excess reached a point where it virtually begged to be cauterized by the punk antidote means you'd be better off living in a velvet lined ivory tower on a diet of Carl Orff and Richard Wagner. Having a healthy acceptance, however, that Prog lost its way doesn't mean that it should be condemned forever to the rubbish tip of history. An uncritical acceptance of our current musical climate assumes that anything that's gone out of date is discredited simply on that account. We must remember our own time is also a 'period' and subject to illusions and ingrained assumptions. As time changes we notice the peculiar listening phenomenon, where



a once much loved record loses all its appeal - and a certain musical approach you were previously lukewarm about suddenly 'clicks', and offers up unpredicted pleasures. In my own experience I have to mention those hoary Manics, Joy Division. As a black-clad youth I found their two albums the perfect apogee of profound and delicious Godlessness. Now they sound like the clumsy ploddings of a gang of post-punk bricklayers with a couple of unread Albert Camus paperbacks in their pockets. Inexplicable shifts happen and shadowy spectres from the past re-emerge. During the early 70s the primitive twangings of Surf music would have sounded embarrassingly naive and corny, but in the 80s, the trash aesthetic established, it sounded relevant and exciting. The current revival of the Moog and predilection for eventless space-rock would have been deemed irrelevant and indulgent in the punk period. With just a little suspension of disbelief and a remembering of its original context, I've found aspects of Prog Rock once more highly listenable. Sifting out the over-ripe clamour of ELP and Yes, the early years of the styles (and its popular practitioners) contain their own peculiar pleasures.

The Marshes of Mellotronia

Rutherford M. and Banks Major waited in the groundsman's shed on the far boundary of Charterhouse School's cricket field. Out of bounds, even for sixth-formers - these chaps knew their activities wouldn't be appreciated by Mr Sowerby, the music beak. With low volume, in fact with his blazer muffling the practice amplifier, Banks struck some sombre chords on a new Mellotron, a gift from his Aunt Victoria, the tune sounding not unlike an anthem which might have been heard in chapel, yet strangely mechanised. Rutherford joined in with his electric bass - a staccato motif he'd heard from Gustav Holst's 'Planets Suite'. Suddenly the door swung ajar. Rutherford dropped his bass on one of his brogues. 'My hat, I thought it was Sowerby!' exclaimed

Banks Major nervously, while Rutherford M. hopped on one foot, his hand holding the other in pain. The intruder was Gabriel P., hair well below school-rules collar length and wearing a hint of black eyeliner. He clutched a dog-eared exercise book decorated with fountain-pen sketches of Lewis Carroll's Alice. 'I say you fellows' he chirped, 'I've just written a new song. I've called it "Stagnation".'

Trespass by Genesis (Charisma G369

905) dates from 1970 and is their first 'proper' album following some tentative recordings made with fellow Carthusian Jonathan King. I picked it up for £1.25 at a Saturday market two years ago, though most owners would have bought it as Genesis became massive in about 1973. It isn't a masterpiece, containing as it does the dull stodgy epic 'The Knife'. But the remainder shares the alluring, gentle qualities of those early-Prog entrees on obscure labels like Neon and Nepantha which collectors merrily shell out £500 for: melodic, post-psych motifs stretched out to generous lengths, swathed in rich, churchlike Hammond organ and, of course, Mellotron. *Trespass* benefits from not featuring any synthesizer - the less bombastic and natural-sounding early Prog has much more appeal to these ears. Also in its favour is the omission of printed lyrics on the watercolour gatefold. Peter Gabriel's penchant for comedic character portrayal and awful wordplay can't yet be detected. The listener can form his own interpretations and is not led by the hand as on later, better selling, Genesis LPs.

The mysterious, vapourous and suggestive mood which makes *Trespass* a muted success is evidenced on only three tracks: 'Stagnation', 'Dusk' and 'Visions of Angels'. All over seven minutes, they evoke a stifling feel of being lost in an untended overgrowth of weeds, deadly nightshade and poisonous ponds of fetid water. The unclear 'bad' production strangely enhances the atmosphere. Piercing the



murk of ornate acoustic guitar and flute meandering come sharp darts of musical sunlight to dazzle. These are created by surging anthemic keyboard riffs. In a clearing in the middle of the forest angels are dancing and they've been clothed by Burne-Jones.

Suffocating Pre-Raphaelite evocations, silver-flutes and musicians sitting down to play are a far cry from Chuck Berry. Does this kind of thing belong in rock? It's too late to protest now, lodged in history and no longer a threat, *Trespass* is a last gorgeous gasp of moonlit English Romanticism. Once you've got over the moral hurdle of even considering listening to Genesis you may even agree.

Slowly Turns the Grinding Wheel

While Genesis never made an entirely satisfying record (and of course they made some stinkers, especially when P. Collins became General Manager) who can claim to have created the perfect early Prog LP? The obvious contender has to be **King Crimson's *In the Court of the Crimson King* (Island ILPS 9111)**. Robert Fripp, the band's stern-lipped overlord, would deny the Prog tag, claiming the term 'evolutionary' for his still continuing unit. Certainly King Crimson have evolved through various incarnations and Fripp's talent for recruiting stringently creative players like improv genius Keith Tippett or anarchic percussionist Jamie Muir has earned a grudging respect denied to less forward thinking Prog dinosaurs. Yet this 1969 debut virtually lays down the ground rules of Prog: expanded pieces with symphonic mellotron, experimental tricky riffs on treated guitar, reeds, flute and percussion section, linked by florid lyrics. Oh yes, the lyrics, the great stumbling block in early King Crimson. Baroque wordsmith Pete Sinfield contributes lines such as 'I chase the wind of a prism ship, to taste the sweet and sour'. Remember that suspension of disbelief!

Better to focus on the playing between Greg Lake's straight faced vocals and you're on an exciting ride through Fripp's patented dischords and seamless sustain. No guitarist in Prog has so easily identifiable a style. His solos on the infamous '21st Century Schizoid Man' make for a Fripp sonic sampler, careering through hurtling clean runs into totally evil hot dagger in the cornea attack. The soft, aleatory interplay of Michael Giles' percussion and Ian McDonald's electric vibes during the twelve minute 'Moonchild' (perhaps skipped by many an original listener for being too weird) is truly astonishing to this day. I can hear echoes of all this in contemporary Japanese avant-noise units like Ruins and Optical*8. Perhaps their cultural distance has freed them from our own inhibitions concerning Prog?

Trespass may have been a relatively new pleasure but we had *In the Court of the Crimson King* in my childhood home from when it first hit the LP charts. As a pre-teenager I was fascinated by it, particularly its lavish EG Day printed gatefold sleeve. If the record is a Prog blueprint then the lurid wraparound painting of a silently shrieking crimson and blue face is equally archetypal. Like a magic talisman it would draw me to look at it when my family were elsewhere. Why did it look so different from other albums with their workaday cover shots of grinning singers? Unhampered by



typography or border it seemed to extend into infinity. During the 80s it was relegated to a cupboard, perhaps by my Mother who was always spooked by 'that horrible face' or perhaps by myself, thinking I now had more enlightened tastes. On a recent trip home I liberated this lonely and unloved artefact and am now happy to include it with the rest of my collection. I'm sure my actions were prompted by something more than mere nostalgia.

Watts in the Hands of Babies



The Brood @ Purcell Room (QEH), South Bank London, 6th November 1996

A mouth-watering programme tempted me into this - music by La Monte Young, John Cage, Phill Niblock, Rhys Chatham? Sonic Boom, Scanner, Susan Stenger, Panasonic among the performers? Show me the queue! As it turned out, the concert was disappointing - it dished up an indigestible mess of poorly-chosen fragments of American 20th century music, and the performances and presentation were decidedly lacklustre. I felt we were being sold a bill of goods - avant-garde music as played by rock musicians. Of course there is an exciting rock/avant-garde interface: ready examples include Stockhausen and Holger Czukay, Luciano Berio and Phil Lesh, and the Sonic Youth-Glenn Branca connection. This concert managed to make this interface seem boring, and a tad pretentious too. The press releases for The Brood told us how Susan Stenger has a 'foot in both camps', which is hard to swallow - does merely following in Sonic Youth's wake qualify you for such an epithet? I suspect this is a one-way traffic thing: rock musicians can borrow and popularise ideas from the avant-garde, but can they bring anything back the other way? These people may dig La Monte Young's work, but are they really equipped to interpret his material? To these ears, the night's contributions of Panasonic and Scanner - ostensibly playing someone else's compositions - appeared no different to what they normally do on their own records.



The choice of music looked good on paper, but the programming of events was hardly felicitous. The second half, for example, gave us the concert's highlight - 25+ minutes of a pretty good, loud and long Phill Niblock drone. But any beneficial effects on the listener were swiftly negated by the hamfisted Rhys Chatham noise-blast immediately following. This sub-Branca mishmash quickly deteriorated into sludge until only the snare drum stood out from the murky avalanche of guitar histrionics - the drumbeat simply reinforced how tedious this composition was. Of course, the wretched acoustics of this venue don't help - a huge black drape was muffling 50% of sounds, while simultaneously bouncing back all the top end range towards the audience. Admittedly the promoter had obviously made some attempt to put like with like in the programme. Part one gave us the 'difficult' stuff; a Panasonic performance of Alvin Lucier which began to work when the electronic noises got so loud as to threaten to blow the speakers; a dismal Christian Wolff performance, verging on the plinky-plonk that gives avant-garde composition a bad name; and a sprawling shambles of three John Cage items performed

simultaneously. This last one featured Shelley Hirsh going bananas with some hysterical vocalese gibberish - if only it'd been louder - and Scanner performing 'Fontana Mix' according to his own lights, which meant using random samples from records of John Cage readings. This melange promised in some places to catch fire, but obstinately refused to do so - the players stood on the brink of tipping it over into a delicious chaos of event-overload, but regained composure in the nick of time. Part two brought together three composers associated with minimal drones and harmonic tunings: Young, Niblock and Chatham; and also perhaps attempted to appeal to the rock component of the audience - all three pieces featuring electric guitars (sometimes played with the E-Bow), and players associated with the rock field. Yet they also brought rock's bad attitude - the performers seemed non-committal, detached from their work. No pieces or players were introduced, only perfunctory attempts to acknowledge applause, even the dress was dismayingly art-student informal. I personally regretted this complete lack of a sense of occasion (and it's quite common nowadays). You never sensed they even enjoyed doing this - rather, they rushed to get off stage and usher on the next act. Panasonic, the very first to appear, were virtually smuggled on stage in near-darkness, then remained crouched virtually out of sight behind electronic equipment. No doubt this adds to their mystique, but it came across as smug and ironic. Do they get away with it simply because it's avant-garde music? (as if to say to an audience, if you like this noisy subversive stuff then you surely can't be bothered about anything so bourgeois as good presentation.) Give me AMM any day of the week - even if their performances haven't always taken off, they've never failed to involve and engage the spectator in a near-religious ceremonial, with their focused approach to playing and their respectful silences and pauses.

This event, co-ordinated by Susan Stenger, was affiliated to the 'American Independents' season at the South Bank, a programme which has also included some orchestral music by John Adams, George Crumb and Frank Zappa (among many others). The Brood was I suppose their concession to the fringe / avant-garde geniuses, but I can't help feeling they were poorly represented by this token gesture. John Cage and La Monte Young in particular suffered here from excessively 'free' interpretations of their works. At least with the Niblock piece, the composer himself was present, and playing a sampler, which for many reasons made it the most successful of the pieces. The very presence of a good American Monster is what's needed (as anyone who saw the dismal attempts to play Zappa will tell you): in the final analysis these composers tended to bring so much of their own personalities to their work that not everything can be written down or notated in such a way as to guarantee a successful interpretation by other musicians. I think The Brood event demonstrated this in spades.

Van Dyke Parks

***Song Cycle* Warner Brothers WS 1727 (1968)**

also on Edsel ED CD 207 (1988 reissue)

DELIRIOUS, HALLUCINOGENIC VISIONS OF AMERICA'S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE - both real and imaginary, seen from a determinedly eccentric and off-beat viewpoint. Acid-tinged Andrew Wyeth paintings. But before you jump to any conclusions, let's first state that Parks refused the druggie culture, as he did all libertarian components of the hippie movement, as gleaned from a statement concerning when he first met Brian Wilson on Terry Melcher's lawn: 'Those were the days of considerable drug abuse, not among us, but surrounding us.' It's possible to read the record as a warped *National Geographic* trip at high speed across the States: the very opening, a snatch of 'Black Jack Davey' with banjos, invites us to set off on this vagabond journey like the Gypsy itinerant of this traditional folk song. Strange snapshots and home movie footage have been fetched back from this voyage. We glimpse the Kansas midwest in 'All Golden' (although Alabama appears to be the setting). Laurel Canyon Boulevard is an address in California - the West Coast flavour permeates throughout, with the biblical journey 'I Came West unto Hollywood' confirmed near the end of side 2 by the impersonation of the Andrews Sisters. 'Widow's Walk' could be somewhere on the East Coast, perhaps a Maine fishing village. 'The Attic' is surely a vision of a Dutch Pennsylvania home with hand-made Shaker furniture - 'I was there upon a four-poster'... The vision is kaleidoscopic, switching us from one location to another, crossing time frames with lightning speed. Only the ring composition of the ordering of track titles makes the slightest concession to linear sense. Both lyrical and musical fragments are deployed, laid out in a mosaic technique which concocts broken images, and alludes to meaning rather than dictates it. The lyrics of 'All Golden' can give us - like Walt Whitman - a rich vision of a sun-drenched corn field, and for one second - with a pun about a 'frigidaire' - cuts in a vision of Betty Furness with a Westinghouse refrigerator in a 1950s suburb. Parks' allusiveness in his lyrics seems to defeat some people. Mike Love of The Beach Boys still asks himself to this day what was meant by 'The Crow Flies, uncover the Cornfield'.

The rich melange of musical quotes and samples is Parks' greatest achievement here however. Charles Ives is the closest ancestor for this, both in his reworkings of traditional American folk music, and his fondness for having two or more different melodies played on top of each other. With Parks, while there are some specific quotations (which I believe include Beethoven and Scott Joplin), it is more the idiom and regional flavours he's trying to capture - hence Country and Western slide guitar on 'Palm Desert', Appalachian hammered dulcimer and jazz swing drum kit on 'All Golden'. But these spot-checks don't convey the totality. Parks seems bent on swallowing American musical history whole, in the same way Melville's *Moby Dick* opens with a huge catalogue of classical quotation. Black music and culture are given a highly idiosyncratic twist on 'By The People', a lyric filled with many punning twists and turns, extravagant connections and heavy irony. The squeaky clean Andrews Sisters are juxtaposed with a menacing drawl in a patronising argot - 'By chance are you gwine git out de way o'de darkies'. What are to make of this? My guess this is as close as Parks will allow himself to social commentary, perhaps on the civil rights movement. As 'Vine Street' on this record is a Randy Newman composition (and Parks has other connections with his friend and fellow songwriter), we could compare notes between this song and Newman's version of 'Underneath the Harlem Moon', a song apparently celebrating 'the joys of racism' as Greil Marcus has pointed out. (This also looks forward to 1984's *Jump*, which we may discuss in detail in another column; it featured phonetically spelt out southern dialect for the lyrics, and Parks on the back cover dressed as a Southern Gentleman in a white suit.)

Song Cycle is incredibly dense, packs an overload of information into a record less than 40 minutes long, and can verge on the indecipherable unless you play it in its entirety, and pay close attention. Even today it sounds difficult - the weird recording, the constant changes, the sound effects - all stitched together like a patchwork quilt. It can shift from widescreen Technicolor visions as intense as those in *Days of Heaven*, to intimate piano / vox miniatures such as 'Pot Pourri' or 'Public Domain' - whose firework sound effects connect you to the Rockets Red Glare and the Fourth of July, but also suggests each composition is like a catherine wheel, sparkling for an instant before it vanishes. The printed credits give you some clues as to how this overblown sound was committed to tape - not only the enormous session orchestra, but 'Stereo and Monaural compositions by Bruce Botnick' and 'Sound Effects by Jack Glaser and El Supremo'. One antecedent for a record of this processed lushness is surely the exotica - stereo separation easy-listening records so beloved of the 'cheesy-listening' set (probably old hat by the time this goes out) - Esquivel, Mantovani, Les Baxter. Although I understand that even some classical music in the 1950s was recorded with enhanced echo, perhaps to give it that 'concert hall' effect. Totally wayward and over the top, this record is a true oddity as extreme as Charles Laughton's movie *Night of the Hunter*. Even if he had only made this record, Van Dyke Parks should be assured a place in world history. The connections between this and the project which immediately preceded it, Brian Wilson's *Smile*, are fairly self-evident. I take one of *Song Cycle*'s subtexts as 'The motor car has changed America'; for further information, simply watch *The Magnificent Ambersons*, or look at R Crumb's cartoon 'A Short History of America'. There's a car-horn sound notated and played by French horns on 'Palm Desert', suggesting a 1920s Ford emerging out of the dust as the spirit of the age strikes out West. There's a vision of modern commuter hell with the sad procession of cars glimpsed in 'Laurel Canyon Boulevard'. We need only compare this with the Bicycle Rider of *Smile* - 'See what you done to the home of the American Indian'.



Cindy War Arrow's Skipload Of Tapes

Driven away from my beloved Radio 4 by yet another interminable edition of Kaleidoscope laden, as per bloody usual, with items on Shakespeare and Opera (again!) I turned to my skip in which are stored a random selection of cassettes that have to date proven too forbidding to listen to, given my low boredom threshold...

Siegmar Fricke, *Wash and Go*, Cassette C45, Anachronismus AT01 (1992)

The cover of this particular item caught my eye...a pleasing collage reproduced in vivid florescence by courtesy of a laser copier. To be frank I haven't got the faintest idea who Siegmar Fricke might be or how this copy of his magnum opus should come to be in my possession, but perhaps that's no bad thing. Thus I may be able to 'Listen Without Prejudice' as the great sage George Michael put it.

Wash and Go contains eight tracks of what might be described as dance music, in as much as it's possible to ascribe that term to Chris and Cosey's output. Indeed young Siegmar's tape reminds me somewhat of the aforementioned duo: the sequencers, the inventive rhythm patterns and the general feel are akin to their later offerings, though happily not nearly so piss poor. The standout compositions here are 'Why don't you move' and the title track, both of which chug along quite cheerily with an imaginative and refreshing quotient of surprises. I doubt that in its present state much here would work as dance music, given certain passages of repetitive tedium. I would however argue that the strength of any worthwhile dance record which can truly claim to be having it large style, if you will, is that repetition, done properly, is an advantage and not a flaw. I managed to listen to this, in the comfort of my own front room, all the way through. Which counts for a lot considering I rarely manage more than the first 45 seconds of most cassettes.

I wouldn't recommend Siegmar Fricke to everyone and in truth I may not actually listen to *Wash and Go* ever again, but in its favour this is well recorded and has some nice touches to it. If you've considered investigating Chris and Cosey's back catalogue, think again; although their first

three albums are fine, that was a long time ago. Turn your attention rather to this chap, who does it far better with less equipment and actually sounds like he bothers to stay awake during recording.

*Anachronismus, c/o Axel Ellinger,
Bittenfelder Str 5, 7140, Ludwigsburg,
Germany.*

The Crucible of Tearer, Racing Room Tapes 1996

Guilt rears its unwelcome head. This is another cassette I seem to have acquired through means I can no longer remember. I have at some point corresponded with the individual behind Racing Room Tapes and may actually have met him, finding him to be an entertaining and interesting individual, but...what we have here is uhm...art. Two voices and a channel of white noise vie for the listener's attention. One monologue is almost unintelligible, the other not so. As my attention gradually focused (about ten minutes into side one) I became vaguely aware of some meaningful discourse unfolding for my edification. It would seem to concern subliminal influences, possibly those of the less comprehensible monologue. The clearer voice seemed to be implying that subconsciously its muddier counterpart was having some obscure effect upon me. 'Surely not', I scoffed and uncannily the tape replied, 'You may scoff at this, but remember you are being affected. If you do not believe so...then try turning this cassette off and not listening to the rest of it. You will find it impossible.'

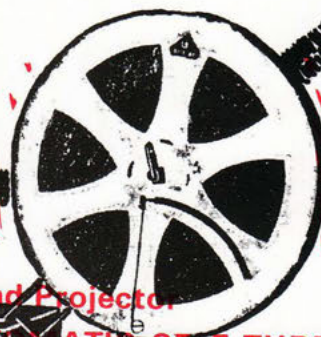
*Au contraire. I found it easy.
37 Egmont
Road, New
Malden, Surrey
KT3 4AT*



H.A.V.E., H.A.V.E. II, Harlequin Tapes

Tapes like this remind me why I became interested in the medium in the first place. The component parts make for a recipe which could in less able hands have made for something slightly less appetising than doggy business pie, however, the mighty Dave, mastermind of both this cassette and the related Harlequin comic has served up a feast

which may leave the discerning ear salivating to more. Leaving culinary comparisons behind before they become ridiculous, what we have here is sixty minutes of completely disparate elements blended into a masterful and cohesive whole. Jazz. Heavy Metal. Sampling. Found sounds. Tape loops. Mathematically confusing progressive rock structures. Most music I've heard combining such ingredients often smacks of square-arsed contrivance, a soulless exercise by persons whose right to draw breath I might question. H.A.V.E. II however, to use a cliché, rocks like a beast. It flows effortlessly through a myriad of genres, reassessing and reinventing them as it goes. It shoots, it scores. It makes all other cassette albums sound like the folly of silly sausages. Highly recommended.



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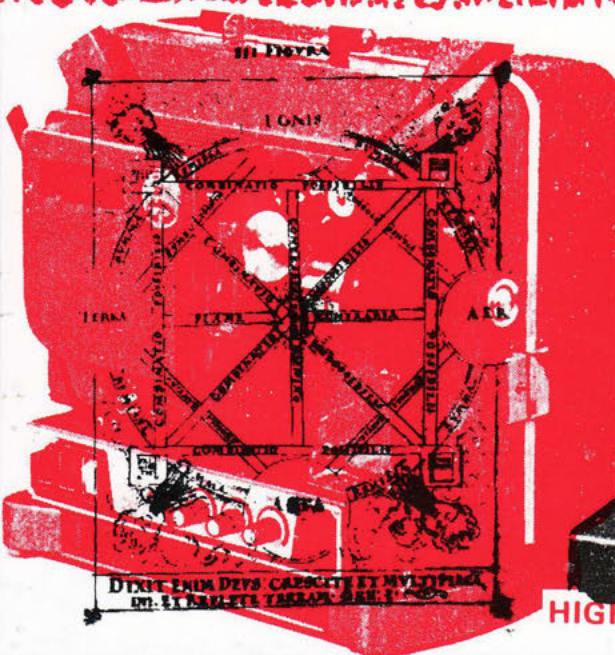
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